The RIVER ROAD

by HAMILTON THOMPSON

Ed. Schrock.

MARTHA TISDALE

THE RIVER ROAD

A Novel of New England Seacoast Folk

BY

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TO THE MEMORY

OF ONE WHO KNEW AND LOVED

HER NEW ENGLAND

My Mother

THE RIVER ROAD

CHAPTER I

PROPELLED by the none too gentle foot of Ozra Hemingway, one of Captain Caleb Fish's old wire eel pots went whirling through the white-washed picket gate, where it lay across the flagged pavement, half in and half out of the yard.

"Dang!" exploded the crabbed Ozra, and he gave the contraption an added kick for daring to be in his way. At that moment Ozra Hemingway had full sympathy with Mrs. Anastasia Fish, who was always complaining: "How can a woman be expected to keep a nice front yard when it was forever cluttered up with sick lobster pots, torn fish nets, small boat gear, and the like, that a man who had given up the sea, like Cap'n Caleb, was alwas' 'droppin' about—and oughter know better!"

Mr. Ozra Hemingway—a seafaring man, too, he would with pride have informed a stranger as he recounted great tales of his days 'board ship—though those in the know would have told you that Ozra's exploits had more to do with pots and kettles in his galley than with romance, since he had been but a ship's cook—was in a hurry.

While he was changing his shirt, a good fifteen minutes before, he had heard the whistle of the morning mail packet approaching its landing. With Mr. Hemingway, changing his shirt was as great a ceremony as it was a rare one—never being done until the color and fabric of the one he was wearing had reached a state of unrecognizability. Wherefore, it sometimes had to be changed. But he did not like to have the changing interfere with his most serious business. By not taking notice of the hour, he had chosen the wrong period in which to change his shirt, and now he was in danger of being late to the post office.

The train was already in but the morning mail was never completely distributed until after the arrival of the up-river boat, and the crowd always waited. Now everybody might be gone. That would never do. The most important business of Ozra's life was to gossip at the post office and today there was something real to gossip about. Something had at last happened in Bayport; and he had much that he wanted to say about it—and a lot more that he wanted to learn.

By now, Ma Tisdale and her crowd would be there, and Mr. Ozra Hemingway had no notion of surrendering, even to her, his crown as chief purveyor of news, and the village's truest, if most lugubrious prophet. Hence, he was in a hurry, and he felt no kindly regard for anything that retarded his progress.

Bayport was in a furore. The whole village had

not been so disrupted, according to Captain Caleb Fish, since part of the Methodist Church had seceded from the main body, because it did not hold with the idea of sprinkling, when anybody ought to know that a body was not properly baptised unless immersed.

The village was in the midst of civil war, as it were—war between the sexes—and it had reached the point where the women were just about to win out. At least, the cohorts of Ozra Hemingway, the most bitter stand-outer for the rights of men, were about to go down to defeat before the braver onslaughts of Ma Tisdale and her champions, who held out for the rights of women.

To put it more exactly, the bitter struggle had narrowed itself down to a personal controversy between Ozra Hemingway and Ma Tisdale—and anyone in Bayport knew that no one, not even the sharp-tongued, pessimistic Ozra, had a chance with Ma Tisdale, once she had made up her mind.

It was all on account of the Neptune Club. For years, the Neptune Club had been Bayport's big institution. It was believed to be as impregnable as the rocks of Ripping Reef, outside Bayport's harbor.

Originally its membership had been composed entirely of deep-water sailormen—and those were the happy days! They were the right little, tight little clique all to themselves. They were proud of their exploits, and were never so happy as when snugly ensconsed in their club room, spinning the yarns that could not be denied, since there was none to say

"nay" to whatever might be recounted of happenings out in the Seven Seas.

Then the club had started to disintegrate. With the decadence of the whaling industry, with its falling off of raw material, it had become necessary to let the portholes open, figuratively speaking. And so, the membership had changed. Seafaring men of all description—coasting skippers, fishermen, barge men, with a sprinkling of yacht captains—"brass button boys," as this type of sailorman were rather opprobriously called—had been admitted, but not without doleful head shakings on the part of the original shell-backs.

Now it looked as if the end of things had come. Certainly the liberty, if nothing more, of free sailormen was threatened. The women had declared themselves in on the Neptune Club, and it looked as though not even Ozra Hemingway's bitter denunciation of the idea, or all the fighting of the club's members, would be of any avail.

Ma Tisdale had spoken!

There was to be an Auxiliary to the Neptune Club—and that was all there was to it!

"There is reform needed in that club," declared Ma Tisdale, and her thin lips shut tight in the expression Bayporters knew so well—none better, though, than her own step-son Trueman Tisdale, and his pretty young wife, Martha, who had early found out that Ma Tisdale was a disagreeably persistent sort of person.

Ozra Hemingway turned the corner toward the

post office just in time to witness Ma Tisdale's triumphant exit. There was something in the carriage of that tall thin figure, with its flapping calico skirt, that spelled misfortune to the former sea cook. Under his clean shirt, his heart sank.

If he had needed further confirmation of his worst fears, though, it would have been given him by the sheepish manner with which Captain Caleb Fish hurried away at his, Ozra's, approach.

Not that any one could say that Captain Caleb was in any wise afraid of Ozra—for was not Captain Caleb the richest, and therefore, the most important, man in town? Bluff and hearty in manner and speech, good nature fairly radiated from his countenance. He was a type of the deep-water sailorman that is fast disappearing. He had given up the sea a few years before, though, and had, when he signed up for shore duty, taken a wife unto himself. In his mating, as in many other matters, Captain Caleb had been more fortunate than many, for in choosing Anastasia to skipper his shore craft he had chosen a woman whose amiability was as noticeable as her goodly proportions.

On the sea, Captain Caleb had made it his boast that he was afraid of no man. On shore, he made a valiant effort to carry it out, but there was Ozra Hemingway with whom to reckon.

He "warn't afeered of Oz 'xactly," he had often remarked, but he "jest couldn't abide no he-male gabber." Likewise, he "would run a mile from a woman's tongue, and Oz war a dern sight wuss."

It was characteristic of Captain Caleb, however, that he had an excuse for Ozra. He had one for any individual who was unfortunate enough to be disagreeable.

"Oz has suffered a come-down in life," he explained to members of the Neptune Club one day when the question of the desirability of Ozra had come up for about the hundredth time. "Prob'ly 'counts fer his ingrowin' disposition—for Oz was a good cook in the old days—old days of long whalin' vy'ages, that lasted two and three years. A 'doctor' of the galley war a mighty important pusson, I kin tell ye, and he ranked high, too—almost next ter th' skipper. And now, to spend his last days as a plain ord'nary clam digger—wal, now, hain't that 'nough to sour anybuddy's disposition?"

Ozra Hemingway, as he hove in sight, did not fail to see Captain Caleb hurrying away from the post office. It was enough for him. He knew that Captain Caleb, in spite of all opposition that he, Ozra, had put up—in spite of all his urging, had at last capitulated. Which being the case, meant also that Captain Hen and Captain Lem, too, who always followed the portly Captain Caleb, had gone by the board. If so, the day was lost.

The members of the Neptune Club had felt that they could safely leave the ultimate decision in all important matters to the trio of old salts who were the club's oldest originators. And so when it seemed impossible to longer put off the momentous decision of tacking on an auxiliary, Captain Caleb Fish,

Captain Hen Berry and Captain Lem Tooker composed the committee, whose word was to be final, and was to be so accepted by all.

Captain Caleb's ignominious retreat could mean only one thing. Ozra glared malignantly in the direction of the portly captain's disappearing figure.

Jonas Sands hitched up a suspender and tittered at Ozra, as the little man blew into the post office, "like the blast of a sou'easter," as Captain Hen, seated on a soap box unobserved by the angry ex-cook, remarked with a wink to one of the youngsters whom he was regaling with a sea yarn in the interim of patching up the sail of a shingle ship.

"Wal, I see they beat ye, Oz!" was Jonas' exasperating greeting.

"Meanin' jest what?" The little sea cook's voice was a rasp, as he glared at his tormenter.

"Meanin'," went on Jonas, leaning up against the door casing the better to enjoy the effect of his news, "that if ye had been here a bit sooner ye would have heard first hand how Cap'n Caleb and Cap'n Hen, and 'tother of the committee had decided to let the wimmin inter th' Neptune Club. Ma Tisdale was jest here, brimmin' over with importance, and she and some on th' rest of 'em were braggin' on how they were goin' to begin to reform you old shell-backs, and bring some culture to that club that has been a sin and a disgrace for so long. 'Low ye'll find pretty pink ribbins on yer cheers when ye git thar, and mebby a few hand-painted spittoons—"

Ozra did not wait for further details. Something

resembling a groan escaped him as he turned and fled from the tittering Jonas—fled without going through the time-honored ceremony of opening his letter-box for the long-expected missive that never came, unless it was a circular, a catalogue or the like. Outside the door, he came up before Captain Hen with a jerk.

"I'd like ter know," was his wrathful beginning.

Unnoticing, Captain Hen lifted Myra Morton's youngest to his knee, as he went on with the weird story he was telling.

"As I war sayin,'" he related to the crowding youngsters who were listening with wide-opened eyes, "the natives live in th' tree-tops like monkeys. The men folks always wear stove-pipe hats in th' mornin', like Doc Stivers, and swallow-tail coats in the evenin', th' same as the minister. An' they go out in their autermobiles, a'skimmin' 'long the beach—"

"Huh! 'Tain't surprisin' none that th' young uns of this village is spoilt what with th' tarnation lyin' of—"

Ozra's second bid for recognition had results. Captain Hen looked up with a grin.

"Oh, thar ye be, Oz," he drawled with an assumed placidity he did not feel, but which infuriated the already exasperated clam digger. "Oughter be a good tide to-day. Be ye goin' down ter th' flats?"

"No, I be'ant," snapped the angry Ozra.

"Wal, it's a fine day; what's on yer mind, Ozra?"

"On my mind? Huh! Ye kin ask—" In his righteous wrath, the small man could only stutter. "Ye kin ask—you and Caleb Fish who sneaks off

'cause he's afeered to face me—and the rest of ye! Traitors! Mebby ye'll tell me, Mr. Cap'n Hen Berry," there was emphasis in the extra title. "Is hit true what Jonas says? Is hit true that ye have let th' wimmin in?"

"Now, don't ye go gittin' obstrep'rus, Oz," soothed Captain Hen. "I wouldn't say as how we let 'em in 'xactly, but I 'low hit's 'bout right that they've kinder slipped in. Guess hit t'won't do ye no harm. I 'low, though," he went on hastily, at the almost apoplectic twist of Ozra's countenance, "mebby some on us needs that air reformin' they're contin'ally talkin' 'bout—"

Captain Hen waited until Ozra's face had reverted more to its habitual expression before venturing another remark. "Ye know, Ma Tisdale is goin' in fer reformin' and sech—"

"Ma Tisdale reformin'! Huh!" There was a whole volume in Ozra Hemingway's snort. "And ye let 'em do hit?" If looks could have killed, Captain Hen would have shriveled on his soap box.

"What ye goin' ter do?" he demanded weakly, "when they's pir-rates 'board? 'Low ye better let 'em trap ye in the hold ruther than make ye walk the plank."

Captain Hen turned from the wrathy Ozra to the children who were wonderingly trying to grasp the import of the altercation. They were used to the rages of Ozra Hemingway—who in Bayport was not? But they did not like the somewhat sad ex-

pression on the face of their usually jovial story-teller and best friend.

Had Captain Hen been a little less rotund, and a little taller—had his beard been longer instead of being the gray fringe it was, framing his moon-like face—and had he been a few other things, he might have passed for the Ancient Mariner himself, as far as being a son of the sea was concerned, for he wore all the earmarks of his former calling as a badge of honor.

In Bayport, Captain Hen was spoken of as a character. Nor did he resent—he rather relished the appellation. A kindly, philosophical old soul, who had a good word for every one—a man whom the children followed on the streets, and who was never happier than when whittling out for them a toy of some sort, or a boat, and attaching paper sails to it, while he spun sea yarns for their entertainment.

Captain Hen would never have been able to pose for any fashion plate, but in his nautical togs he was a wholesome figure—and one for whom people's eyes lighted up with pleasure when he "hove to." He was addicted to baggy old trousers, and there was always a patch on one knee. Captain Caleb always said: "That thar knee was worn out by children who clumb on hit."

It was a secret whether or not Captain Hen wore suspenders, for any sign was covered up by his old sweater with its anchor decoration in worsteds, the sleeves of which were rolled back to display a horny weathered hand and the tattooed ship and coat of

arms on the inside of an arm that was gnarled and knotted.

"What need did Cap'n Hen have fer suspenders?" argued Captain Caleb in defense of his old shipmate. "Any'un with a hitch like his'n could keep 'em up by main force and awkwardness."

But when Captain Caleb defended him, he was sure to add—evidently in order that the defense would not puff him up any, that "Cap'n Hen Berry was th' most logical liar 'tween P'int Jude and Bangor."

And now, despite his invariable optimism and of his apparent philosophical acceptance of the facts, Captain Hen was far from happy at the thought of feminine invasion of the heretofore sacred precincts of the Neptune Club.

Like Captain Caleb and Captain Lem, he had been out-generaled and out-talked. And as he sat in the sun, his youthful admirers gathered about him, he was troubled. For he, like everyone else in Bayport, knew just what surrender to Ma Tisdale—to her chief lieutenant, Mehitable Sands, and the lesser lights—meant.

The Neptune Club was to be reformed and purified. There was no doubt of it. The long-fought battle of an auxiliary or no auxiliary was over. The Auxiliary was a fact!

Jonas Sands' statement that the women of Bayport were even then taking possession was a true one.

Ma Tisdale had waited for no more than Captain

Caleb, Captain Lem and Captain Hen's hesitating "yes" to lead her triumphant band to the club rooms and to begin their work of reforming.

Mops and brooms were already flying with feverish energy through the big main room that had been for so long a time a haven of rest, and even beloved for its cobwebs and tobacco-stained floor and sawdust-filled spit boxes.

Captain Hen was thoughtful for a moment as he watched Ozra Hemingway clumping down the street. A sigh of regret escaped him. He was brought out of his reverie by a small hand that tugged at his fresco of whiskers, and an eager voice that demanded:

"Tell us some more, Cap'n Hen; tell us some more!"

Captain Hen's eyes were still on Ozra. He shook his head, and then a grin came back to his weathered features, as he visualized the reception awaiting the ex-cook at the club rooms.

"Wal, hit will make Ozra cheerful, as usual—jest as cheerful as th' blast of a sou'easter—" He brought himself out of his soliloquy at the persistence of the children.

"Speakin' 'bout blasts," he went on chucklingly, as though there had been no interruption, "reminds me of a twist of wind we onc't had down off Desolation. Yes, siree," flipping the Morton youngster under the chin, "it war so durned blasty hit worked 'round under our far'ard bilge, an' jest lifted that air vessel's nose clean outer water—and a big

snub-nosed whale, what had breached off ter th' star'bard a moment before, swum clear under us, without touchin' hide or hair of th' keel—"

"O-o-o-h!" breathed the delighted Morton boy, as he hid his face under Captain Hen's chin camouflage. The old sailorman laughed as his head wagged sagely.

"Yes, siree, that war some blast. . . . And I'm thinkin' some more blasts jest like hit air 'bout due." His face again took on a worried look as he gazed down the street.

CHAPTER II

OZRA HEMINGWAY, after his last say in the disrupted club room, was glooming at the window that looked out down the river toward the sea, when Captain Hen started clubward. In spite of the fact that the Neptune Club would never again be what it had been, Captain Hen could not remain away. Through all his bachelor shore existence, the Neptune Club had been to him what the homes of other men had been to them. Now all was changed. He squirmed as there rose before him the vision of Ma Tisdale as high priestess of the club.

Along the narrow winding street that was so unchanged with the passing years that it was the same as in the prosperous days of whaling and when whaling men called Bayport their home port, the doughty old sailorman's mind was shrouded in gloom. Unseeing he passed the "Variety Store," and gave but a perfunctory nod to Miss Amanda Perkins, who stood on the stoop of her home next door, one hand shading her eyes as she contemplated the sky for weather signs. Unconsciously Captain Hen's gaze lifted toward the tops of the houses, and as he tugged at his fringe of circling whiskers, a reminiscent expression came to his face.

"That was a time when wimmin—" he whispered to himself, "when wimmin—"

The rest was completed in his mind. And it concerned the "Widow's Walk" atop the Sands home two houses down the street. Was the time when the women of Bayport were content with far different activities than bothering with the running of a seaman's club. There were too many real serious things to do in those days—too much else to think about.

The "Widow's Walk" on the Sands house brought it all back as though it had been but yesterday—the hours on hours that the wives of Bayport had passed on the little fenced-in platforms atop their houses, watching for their men folk to return safely from sea.

In those days the women fulfilled the somber refrain:

> "For men must work, and women must weep—
> Though the harbor bar be moaning—"

In those days, a little flat place, surrounded by a railing, was built on nearly all of the houses of Bayport, that faced the harbor, and it came to be known as the "Widow's Walk." And there the wife would watch and wait for the ship that was late in coming—and often the wife would be the widow, who would never see her man again.

Captain Hen's absorption was terminated abruptly, as Mrs. Anastasia Fish bore down on him, with "all sails set." The old sailor's face lighted

up, for he, like almost everyone else in Bayport, always had a smile for the good-natured consort of Captain Caleb Fish. She was everybody's friend. Where Anastasia went, from there gloom fled, and sunshine came in its place.

"Wal, Cap'n Hen," she greeted, as she paused in her hurried walk, her ample bosom rising and falling rhythmically beneath her over-filled black silk basque, "ye look like ye was bilious; 'tain't serious, be hit?"

The twinkle in Anastasia's eyes indicated that she well knew her question to be superfluous.

Captain Hen's head wagged, and he pulled his whiskers vigorously, as was his custom when perplexed.

"Guess ye thinkin' 'bout th' club, hain't ye?" she asked. "An' ye think everything's gone to smash —jest like Caleb. Since he had ter giv' in this mornin'—lettin' us wimmin inter th' club—thar han't no livin' in th' house with him."

Captain Hen came back to realities. With one hand grasping his hairy adornment, which served to hold his head cocked to one side, he squinted sideways at her.

"Anastasia, do ye think hit's all right for ye wimmin to bust inter our club as ye have?"

Mrs. Fish laughed heartily.

"Oh, cheer up, Hen Berry," she retorted. "Hit won't be as bad as ye think; cheer up! Washington's Birthday is over, I know, but th' Fourth of July is comin'—an' chowder—"

For an instant, a light came into the depressed sailorman's eyes.

"Chowder?" he repeated. "An' ye—"

Mrs. Fish nodded cheerily. "Yes," she finished, "Ma Tisdale may be head boss, but I'm chief chowderer."

"Thar may be some things ter be thankful fer, after all," was Captain Hen's admission, "but what I'm a thinkin' of is Ma Tisdale and Mehitable, and—"

"They won't bite ye none," came from the big woman testily. "Mebby ye'll be glad after awhile, when ye see what we can do fer th' club—"

But Captain Hen was not to be so easily appeased.

"Ye know Ma Tisdale," he began.

"And ye know me, too," completed Mrs. Fish. "Now, I'm askin' right out, Hen Berry, have ye any objections ter me in yer club?"

Uneasy as he was at the question so bluntly put, all the gallantry of which he was capable was mustered to answer this wife of his best friend.

"But, they're not all like you, Anastasia," he said. "The Good Book tells somewhere 'bout a little leavenin' the whole lump, but what I do say now is this—" he paused to give emphasis to his remark, "If you think ye can leaven this lot of Bayport wimmin, then ye're gotter be a lot bigger yeast cake than ye be."

Mrs. Fish gave him a playful push. "Oh, you go on, Cap'n Hen Berry," she simpered. "How

in time sech a flatterer as you wuz never married beats my stars!"

But as she again got under way down the street, and Captain Hen ambled on toward the disrupted club, the big wife of Captain Caleb Fish was pleased —mightily pleased.

Mrs. Fish had referred to Washington's Birthday. It was the day of days to the members of the Neptune Club—a day to be celebrated by a parade and an all-day jamboree. Clam chowder and plum duff held high places in the menu.

There was no such maker of chowder and plum duff in all Bayport as Mrs. Anastasia Fish, and there was a little lightening of Captain Hen's burden as he remembered this fact. At least, with women like Mrs. Fish in the club, the feasts were certain of success. And Captain Hen loved his chowder. Now, she had intimated, too, there would be two big gala days in the club's year, for it was evident the women intended to add the Fourth of July to their merry-making times.

Heretofore, only Washington's Birthday had been celebrated. The immortal George was the patron saint of the Neptuners—why, no one could have told easily, unless the rumor that had so long been persistent was true—that the great patriot was revered so because the Neptuners themselves took such liberties with the truth. Be that as it may, Neptuners' yarns were celebrated all along the coast, and had been for many a moon.

Captain Hen believed he smelled soapsuds before

he turned the corner of the winding street that led to the club rooms. He knew that his nostrils had not betrayed him as he almost timidly opened the door and slipped in. How contrasting to the times and times he had rolled into the same room and known himself to be in a safe harbor!

Soapsuds were in the air! The floor was still wet from its unaccustomed scrubbing, and Captain Hen's sniff gave him another pang. At first he did not know what it was. Then he realized. The smell of nicotine that had been the homiest of odors for so long, was missing. It smelled sort of like a hospital! Captain Hen almost groaned as he slid into a chair beside Captain Lem Tooker and Captain Tony Keeney, the old tars too depressed with the day's doings to set up the checkers that lay idly between them.

Ma Tisdale, her skirts pinned up apron-fashion across her knees, came sloshing in from the galley, with a pail of water. She looked crossly at the three men.

"We're goin' now, for awhile," she announced sternly to the forlorn sailormen who watched her, and Mehitable Sands, who followed gingerly, shaking out her wet broom, "and don't ye dast let me ketch ye spittin' on th' clean floor—you, Cap'n Hen Berry, or you, Cap'n Tony, or you, either, Cap'n Lem Tooker—and don't ye cuss, nuther," she added to the latter with an extra glare. There came a rumble from Captain Lem's throat, a noise that Ma Tisdale did not like.

"Yes'm," was Captain Hen's meek reply; and a duet of groans from the other two was their reply. For a moment after Ma Tisdale's triumphant exit the men did not speak. Shame-facedly they glanced at each other.

"Reform," began Captain Hen plaintively, but the explosion that came from the opened lips of Captain Lem Tooker, cusser in extraordinary of the Neptune Club, fairly shook the rafters of the building. It established a record right then and there. It was a safe guess that feminine rule in the Neptune Club was not overly popular with him.

Aside from the odor of the soapsuds and antiseptics, the rooms of the Neptune Club were as they had been for many a memorable day—indeed, ever since the time the club was first started, in a nearby sail loft.

The men looked about them at the familiar objects. Yes, there was the huge-bellied stove, in its place of honor in the center of the room, dismantled of its pipe and trappings for the summer. There were the wooden armchairs, worn shiny by the lounging of members who had occupied them for years. There were even the familiar-whittled spots where sailormen, carried away by the yarns they were spinning, had absent-mindedly cut into the surfaces. There were the boxes of sawdust doing duty as cuspidors. Each of the men wondered, as they glanced at the cuspidors, how much longer they would last. Ma Tisdale had mentioned them. Perhaps, even then she was on her way to buy some new fangled

ornate ones. There were the same marine trophies and pictures of men and ships that had been finding a last resting place in the club rooms for these many years.

Over in one corner of the big room was a partitioned-off space that had always been affectionately dubbed the "galley." This club kitchen had an entrance that was rounded out into a quarter circle, apparently to make possible a sliding door of the same design—a door that had worked its way into the affections of the sailormen who had designed it —for it had been the cause of more picturesque, half-forgotten sea oaths, when it had refused to slide, than anything else in the club.

Yes, aside from the strangely clean smell, the club seemed the same—but yet it was not the same. Captain Hen gingerly let his chair down from its prop against the wall, as though afraid of disturbing someone who was sick or sleeping. It was in almost a whisper that Captain Tony spoke as he rose and squinted out of the window.

"'Most dinner time," he commented. "Now, where in time do ye 'spose Cap'n Caleb—"

As if in answer to the query, Captain Caleb Fish joined his cronies. But it was not in his usual blustering way. Captain Caleb was plainly subdued. He looked about him anxiously.

"By godfrey, it's hot, hain't it? Be ye 'lone," he asked eagerly. The nods that answered him were not enthusiastic.

"Fer a minute—till Ma Tisdale gets her second wind," came the reply from Captain Hen.

Had it not been a bit pitiful, the sight of these sad-faced old seafarers would have been a laughable one—and unusual to those who really knew them, for there had been a time when each had been master of himself and of the small world aboard the ship where he was supreme.

There was Captain Lem Tooker, for instance. There had not been a whaler along the coast who could have questioned his bravery. In the old days he had been a pretty important man. Then he had given up his whaling career—when the bad days fell on the whaling industry. Now he had taken to inland water seafaring. The steamer *Julia,* which he skippered, was a familiar craft thereabouts. She had made the round trip between Harwich and Bayport, so many times, that the date of the inauguration of the service was lost in the mists of antiquity. It was a favorite saying of Captain Caleb's when he felt in the mood to tease his old club mate, that the old tub could navigate without human agency.

"Yes, siree; I know, one night," he was fond of relating with zest, whenever any stranger was about to listen, "the old *Julia* broke away from her moorings and made th' entire round trip, up the river and back, without a soul on board—and she made several stops on th' way, too—yes, siree!"

Only by courtesy was Captain Tony Keeney a captain. The old salts felt that he had earned the title now that he was eighty-nine, and still as smart

and pert as a man of fifty, save for the bent leg that made him walk with a more decided roll than most sailormen. In his day he had been a boat-steerer of the old whaling fleet, and it had been an accident of those days which caused him now, in his old age, to go to his end with a crooked leg.

One day at sea, on the ancient whaling ship, *Julius Caesar*—fifty years, at least, before—the boat's crew had fastened to a big hump-backed whale. But the whale did not give up without a struggle. It threshed out with its tail, catching the small boat plumb amidships, smashing the light timbers to flinders and knocking the crew galley west.

All hands were picked up, but Captain Tony had suffered a badly fractured leg. He was tenderly taken aboard the whaler and stretched on a mattress in the vessel's cabin. There he laid for forty-five days with only the rough surgical treatment the captain and crew could give. Broken bones set according to their own sweet will, and the way they are treated. And, accordingly, Captain Tony's crooked leg was a souvenir of that experience.

And it was such men as these who now trembled before a feminine voice that had made itself heard in "masterly" tones in their own club.

Captain Tony limped over to the window to join Captain Caleb, who had loosed an old ship's sextant from its moorings on the wall and carried it to the wide-opened window overlooking the water. Captain Hen and Captain Lem gathered around. A ceremony which was an old one with these cronies

was about to begin. And in the heart of each was the lowering thought that it might be the last. What if Ma Tisdale should decide to put a stop to what she might call foolishness?

Captain Caleb raised the instrument on high and squinted through it. The others, too, looked anxiously up at the sun.

"Put yer wheel up, Cap'n, ye're 'way off th' horizon," admonished Captain Lem. It was a daily ritual.

"How in time is a man to find a horizon, when thar' hain't one, I'd like ter know," was Captain Caleb's invariable retort—a response that had been made a hundred times. "Any well-meanin' horizon had oughter be—"

Captain Tony took up station alongside the huge ship's bell that stood in its place alongside the club's capstan head.

"Stand by," ordered Captain Caleb, as he slowly tilted the arm of the instrument to find the horizon that was not there.

"Eight bells!" roared Captain Caleb, in pretended dignity.

Quickly the arm of Captain Tony came up, and with great solemnity he struck the bell, one-two, one-two—eight times.

Captain Caleb's big voice boomed out:

"Twelve o'clock—and all's—"

"Hell!" exploded Captain Lem in a voice that none who had known him in the old days could mistake.

. . . . .

Two years is a short space of time with some. To others it is an eternity. During the two years that the women of Bayport had reigned supreme in the Neptune Club it had seemed but a short period for them to have wrought such changes—to have brought about such vaunted "reforms," as they had done.

But in the unhappiness of the old-timers, whose peace of mind and independence had been invaded, the two years had drawn themselves into many a long day and night. At first they had hoped—and believed—that the women would tire of their auxiliary, and that they would be left in peace, as of yore. But, vain hope! At the end of two years, all such thoughts had vanished. It was more than ever evident that the Woman's Auxiliary of the Neptune Club had come to stay.

There were those members—among the younger contingent—who actually believed that the changes the women had brought about in the club had improved it. But it was the "improvement" that was breaking the hearts, sometimes the spirits of the older sailormen who had organized it and who had cherished it for so many years.

Perhaps, though, the worst dose of all to swallow, was the realization that the Neptune Club was no longer merely a social organization. It had assumed a duty. The Woman's Auxiliary was the arbiter of the town's morals—and woe betide man or woman who fell under its ire—for the fate of a townsman

or townswoman was in its hands. The slightest word or action of a censorable nature was sure to go before the tribunal of the Woman's Auxiliary.

In all this, however, there was some compensation for, at least, one of the original members of the Neptune Club. It was to Ozra Hemingway's taste. He whose breath of life hung on scandal and gossip was delighted to be among the scandal-mongers. It was even better than hanging around the post office. He had to *take* the scandal there. It was *brought* to the auxiliary.

CHAPTER III

SMOKE billowed up from the blackened, much-fingered bowl of Ozra Hemingway's old T. D. pipe as from a laboring locomotive. His ferret-like eyes, set close together in his wizened countenance, roamed discontentedly over the big sun-lit room of the Neptune Club. Their beady stare came to rest on something in front of the wide-open rear windows, through which came the noisy rattle and chugging of a steam hoister unloading a cargo of coal from a barge—which was in contrast to the serenity and calm of the outer harbor with its reflection of the sheen of the sun and the clearness of the water.

Ozra's gaze shifted back to big portly Captain Caleb, who sat by the dismantled stove regarding the smaller man quizzically, as he tamped bits of Sailor's Delight into his own weathered pipe.

Captain Caleb knew those symptoms. Ozra was thinking—and was most likely about to emit one of those remarks which had earned for him the name of being the club's chief misanthrope and pessimist. His lean hand that so nearly resembled an animal's claw with its hairy back, took the pipe from his mouth, and he blew a long gust of smoke toward Captain Caleb.

"Wimmin," observed Ozra Hemingway, shaking his pipe to emphasize his words, "wimmin is pizin."

Captain Caleb grinned as he nodded in the direction of the windows. A pretty girl, rather an unexpected person in the marine atmosphere of the Neptune Club, was standing there beside a youth, whose garb and manners proclaimed him, too, to be a visitor in the club room, but both were too busy over their clumsy efforts with a huge telescopic marine glass which in their unskilled hands wobbled all over the marine perspective spread before them, to know that they were the objects of the unkindly scrutiny of Ozra Hemingway. Not that they would have perhaps cared, for it was evident by her light laughter which rang through the room that the girl was more interested in her companion than in the old fossils of members who resented intrusion into their domain.

"Not meanin' her, in particular, was ye, Ozra?" inquired Captain Caleb, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the girl's direction. "What ye got agin' her? Who be they anyway? Summer folks?"

"Huh!" ejaculated Ozra Hemingway, as he spat expertly into the cuspidor a few feet away, the while he snapped a greasy suspender viciously against a greasy shirt. "Dunno. Hain't int'rested, nuther; hain't never int'rested where wimmin's consarned. 'Cept mebby when they're gittin' outer their rightful place, and steppin' on my toes some. No, I warn't speculatin' about her," the pipe waved toward the window, "jest about wimmin in general. Wimmin,"

he repeated, and there was a hint of venom in his words, "wimmin is pizin."

It was something in his companion's intonation to which Captain Caleb Fish took exception. His mild blue eyes, the sailorman's eyes which for years have accustomed themselves to a sweep of long distances so that they seemed always to be looking afar off, clouded.

"What in thunderation do ye know about wimmin, By godfrey, I'd like ter know, Oz Hemingway?" he exploded. "None on them's ever come clos't enough to you for ye to find out about them—wal, not near enough to do ye any harm. And speakin' about wimmin in general—they hain't generally all alike. Now, my Anastasia—"

"Huh!" once more ejaculated Ozra as he resumed his deep puffs. Captain Caleb swung his tiptilted chair to the floor with a loud bang.

"When ye git all them 'huhs' outer yer system," he exclaimed fiercely, "ye'll be so durned light ye'll need ballast. Now, as I was sayin', my Anastasia—"

"Huh!" issued again from the thin lips of Captain Caleb's companion, with a jet of smoke.

But unnoticing, the huge sea captain went on as though to himself. "Not that there hain't times when she's tryin'—sartinly tryin', but in general I can't say but what life's been a heap sight more interestin' since Anastasia become sailin' master of the craft than when I was to sea."

He tilted his chair again and stared reminiscently before him.

Ozra sneered. "Didn't know ye was sich a wimmin's champeen, Cap'n! Didn't know ye was so int'rested."

Captain Caleb chuckled, as his gaze wandered over to where their usual checker battle was being fought by Captain Lem and Captain Tony. Oblivious of all about them, the two old salts sat there in the sunlight in an appropriate frame, for just above them on the wall was a model of a barkentine plowing along on a bas-relief sea, with all sails drawing and "a bone in her teeth"—just such a vessel as that from which either of them might have stepped.

While that sturdy old river packet, the *Julia,* was laying at its berth at Tompkins' wharf, between trips, Captain Lem was stealing an hour or two for this, his favorite diversion, with Captain Tony.

Tony "warn't sech shakes as a checker player," opined Captain Lem, but such as he was, he was better than none—which opinion was shared by the grizzled Tony, though applied to his antagonist.

Idly, and before he answered the gloomy Ozra, Captain Caleb wondered how long it would be before that checker game would end and the usual heated wrangle would occur. For always one did occur, which wrangle, however, in no wise interfered with the resumption of the game the next day.

Captain Caleb smiled a bit, a tolerant kindly smile as he heard the exuberant laughter coming from the window, and there was something of pity in his glance as he watched the landlubberly efforts of the girl and the youth with the marine glass.

"By godfrey, I 'low somebuddy had ought ter help them two young periwinkles," he said musingly. "Likely they'll begin to think the world's more upside down than 'tis, effen they wiggle that thar glass about much more."

"Huh!" was Ozra's comment, and the sneer that so often twisted his wizened face became more noticeable.

"Ladies' man, be ye? Thought ye warn't so strong fer 'em sence they got theirselves voted inter this here sailors' club. Wimmin, says I, hain't no manner of use in a club—but—"

He snapped his suspender viciously.

"All I could say or do, couldn't keep 'em out, what with a few softies like you, afeerd to up and say 'no', when th' wimmin in this town come ter think they must have an auxil'ry to the Neptune Club—"

Again he spat violently, and settled himself back in the hard-bottomed chair.

Softly chuckling, Captain Caleb leaned forward. He coughed behind his hand, and looked about furtively, before he replied in a rumbling whisper.

"Now don't git me wrong, Oz. Ye say ye're not interested in wimmin; nuther be I, not partic'lar. Jest harden'd to 'em ye might say, sence they hornswiggled us inter this here auxil'ry idee."

"Huh!" Ozra expressed his favorite opinion with a snort. But before Captain Caleb could say more, his attention was drawn to the window. A girlish voice was complaining plaintively.

"Oh, I do wish I could see better! I do want to see that lightship! I thought maybe I could get a glimpse of that silent man we've heard so much about, who keeps it. Jack! I wonder if—"

She turned to glance about the room behind her, and her eyes caught those of Captain Caleb. There was something so human, so heart-warming about Captain Caleb that a first look inspired confidence. Without stopping to think about it, the girl whose soft chiffon gown was blown so foggily about her by the crisp sea air that came through the windows, smiled straight into the eyes of the doughty captain. He shoved back his chair as he rose.

"Mebby I can help ye some, ma'am, although I'm afeered the lightship's a leetle too far ter th' west'-ard," he told her as he strolled toward the window. "Not much used to sea folks or implements, be ye?"

The girl shook her head.

"No, we're strangers here, Jack and I," she told him. "We're stopping at Mrs. Lou Barzum's house, and they told us how interesting this place was, so we just strolled in to look about. I hope we're not intruding," as her eyes sought out the checker players, who were oblivious to any but themselves, their game having reached the point where the wrangle was inevitable. Then she took in the smoke-shrouded figure of Hemingway in his distant corner. "You see," she hesitated, then—"They told us at Mrs. Barzum's that this was not exclusively a man's club—that a woman's auxiliary had recently been organized, and we thought that—"

Captain Caleb smiled understandingly as he took the glass from the girl's hands and began to adjust it.

"Ye thought, I reckon, after ye got in here with these old hulks, that ye'd have to use a spy glass to find 'em. Wal, it hain't allus so—more's the pity," he ruminated with a trace of bitterness that brought surprise to the girl's eyes.

"Why—why," she exclaimed, "don't you like women in your club?" She started to back away, but Captain Caleb put out a protesting hand.

"Some wimmin, Miss—er Miss——"

"Dorothy—Dorothy Merrill, of New York," she completed. "And this is my friend, Jack Billings."

"Miss Merrill," thanked the captain, with an appreciative eye for the girl's fresh young beauty. "But I kinder 'low ye hain't made the acquaintance of all the wimmin in this town, have ye?" There was a twinkle in his keen blue eyes as he finished. Again the girl shook her head.

"No," she said. "Very few. But I should like to know more of them. Some of them are so—so quaint."

Captain Caleb's grin broadened.

"They be all of that—some of 'em," he admitted with a nod.

So interested were the visitors in Captain Caleb's manipulation of the marine glass that they did not notice the little wizened, parchment-skinned Ozra Hemingway, who had left his chair and sidled toward them. In spite of his announced contempt for

women or anything appertaining to them, it would appear that the announcement was not wholly true. There was just one thing in the world Ozra Hemingway loved more than he loved himself. He loved to hear himself talk, and to talk there must be something to talk about. One reason for his present cantankerous mood was that his topics for the day had been exhausted before the post office crowd at the morning gathering. They had not even shown interest in his latest bit of gunfire about how "True Tisdale hadn't come in off the lightship the night before—not at all—and that that there snippy young wife of his'n had set out on the stringpiece of the wharf until all hours, sayin' as how she was waitin' for True, but ef ye should ask him—!!!"

Ozra Hemingway edged forward to hear what Captain Caleb was saying to the club visitors. It was barely possible that he might find fresh fuel for his fires. One never could tell, and these here city folks that come up every summer and made Bayport just one wild place, might be expected to furnish the town crier with something with which to regale his post office hearers. With a start Dorothy turned from peering through the glass as she heard his whining voice at hand. She had been chatting with Captain Caleb.

"Then I was not misinformed," she said. "There are women in this club—Oh, I think it's a wonderful idea—"

"In it?" Ozra Hemingway exploded with a snarl. "In it? They're the hull durn thing!"

Undeterred by Captain Caleb's menacing frown, the small man edged nearer. Dorothy lifted surprised eyebrows at the unexpected interruption, and Jack Billings was undoubtedly displeased by the manner of the newcomer's address.

"I don't believe we've met you, Mr.—" he began coldly. Captain Caleb chuckled at the snap in the little pessimist's eyes.

"But ye've met him," insisted Ozra, indicating the big captain with his gnarled hand. "And he's nobuddy—"

The captain's sides shook with laughter. It was good to see Hemingway discomfited. "Oh, yes I be, Miss Merrill," he retorted good-naturedly, addressing the girl. He stuck his thumbs in his armholes, rocked to and fro on his heels, and his eyes twinkled. "I clean forgot to tell ye, but I'm Captain Caleb Fish. I'm a consider'ble figger in these parts."

"Huh! So's a coal barge." Ozra was irrepressible.

" 'Druther be a coal barge than a durned old hecatamoran. Now, as I was telling ye, Miss Dorothy —er, Miss Merrill—"

With a start and a clutch at the arms of Jack Billings and Captain Caleb, Dorothy turned at the sound of the verbal explosion from the far side of the room.

"Hey! Blast ye, where ye steering tuh?"

The wrangle between Captain Tony and Captain Lem had begun. Captain Caleb put out a protecting hand.

"Now, don't ye go a-mindin' them old fellers, ma'am—they hain't to blame. It seems that cussin' an' high words is jest a part of their enjy'ment when they gets to checkerin'." But toward the two players, he turned a heavy frown. "Hey there, Lem," he called. "Ye're inside the three-mile limit! Remember where ye be!"

Captain Lem subsided with a low rumble, but there was a motion of rebellion in the way he clapped his old cap down over his ear and made his next move. Dorothy looked her surprise as she saw Captain Caleb stride across the room and remove the other's cap. He slammed it down upon the floor with finality. Captain Lem continued to mumble, as he cast reproachful glances at big Captain Caleb, but the fury of the volcano was gone. Slowly he made his next move as the other returned to the window.

"Ye mustn't mind him, ma'am," he explained to the girl who was beginning to fear that she had wandered into the wrong place, in spite of the assurances she had had from her boarding house mistress that the Neptune Club was the big sight of the village and that it extended its hospitality to all. "Ye see, he's given to cussin', is Cap'n Lem, in 'special when Cap'n Tony makes some move down on that darn checkerboard that hain't 'shipshape and Bristol fashion!' His wife Nancy has mighty nigh broke him of th' habit, but the only way he can cotch himself when she's not about is to keep his hat on, and then when he feels like breakin' out, to take hit off and hold hit in his hand. He kinder forgot this

time, I 'low—that's why I kinder had to make him remember to take off his cap. He says ma'am, hit's a wonderful preventative."

Captain Caleb's chuckle as he apologized for his club member was infectious. It was joined in even by Captain Tony. But Captain Lem did not chuckle, nor did Ozra Hemingway, probably because the latter had long since forgotten how, unless it was at some far worse discomfiture of another than was now the embarrassment of the checker player.

But Captain Caleb was not through with Captain Lem. This was too splendid an occasion for teasing, and Captain Caleb had not enough forgotten his boyhood to fail to indulge himself in this, his favorite pastime. Without glancing at Captain Lem, and as though the other were an absentee, he went on, in his voice that would have carried to a far greater distance than the length of the Neptune Club room between Captain Lem and himself:

"Yessir," he said ruminatively, but with evident enjoyment. "Cap'n Lem's got in a peck of trouble one time and another through his cussin'. Was one time not so long ago—ye see, he's skipper of the old *Julia,* and as sech he collects fares from passengers. One of them big portly grand dame ladies from the summer hotel at the P'int come 'board at Harwich for passage down ter Bayport, and as she was passin' along the gangplank, a deckhand he yells out, 'Stir yer stumps!' 'Course, the lady was peeved, and she complained to Cap'n Lem, thar. He was mad, as becomes a good skipper when a member of th' fair

sex is insulted, and he took prompt and effective measures, as th' newspaper writers say, to punish the culprit. So he sings out to him somethin' like this, ma'am: 'Billy, yer dod-gasted son of a sea cook, what in th' Sam Hill do ye mean by talkin' thata' way to a lady? Why, ye ornery lump of galley grease, I'll—"

Captain Caleb halted. The twinkle in his eyes made them glow like blue pools where the sunlight reflects sharpest. "Wal," he hesitated a moment, "leastways hit wa'n't 'zactly in them words he said hit. I don't 'low yer imagination could go so far, ma'am, as ter guess what he did say, but hit'll give ye an idee that Captain Lem's some strong in his langwidge. But he's all right otherwise," he offered condescendingly. "He's all right with his cussin', too, so long as he keeps his hat in his hand."

Dorothy Merrill put out her hand to Captain Caleb Fish.

"I think I must be going now," she said, as she noticed the uneasy manner in which Captain Lem was squirming in his arm chair beneath the barkentine. "It's been so fine of you to allow us to come in at all and we have so enjoyed the talk and the view from the window. Perhaps some other time—"

Ozra Hemingway broke in with a bitterness that seemed to be without cause.

"Oh, ye'll be comin' agin," he remarked. "The wimmin'll see ter that. Most any of them in town'll fetch ye—any of them 'ceptin' one and she—"

He stopped with a little jump as the strong fingers

of Captain Caleb found their way between his fifth and sixth ribs. Ozra Hemingway was not sufficiently padded not to feel the full force of those warning fingers. He subsided with his familiar: "Huh!"

As the girl crossed the club room floor, followed by Jack Billings, Captain Lem Tooker did an unprecedented thing.

His checker game was all but finished. It bade fair to be an exciting finish, too. But with one sweep of his big brown hand, he scrambled the checkers, red and black men alike, into the center of the board. He reached down to the floor for his battered hat and clapped it firmly on to his head. Then he leaned back in his chair and with both hands on the table in front of him, he called in his softest rumble:

"Jest wait a minute, won't ye, ma'am? Ye're a stranger here'bouts, and I don't want ye to git no wrong impressions. I jest want to say somethin' afore ye go, if ye hain't in a hurry."

Surprised, the two visitors stopped midway to the door. Captain Caleb chuckled audibly. Well—it took a pretty girl to get a rise out of Captain Lem that-a way! He wondered what was coming.

"Don't ye pay no 'tention to that old tarfinger, ma'am," went on Captain Lem, pointing a stern brown finger at Captain Caleb. "He's jest tryin' to draw 'tention away from hisself so's he won't show his ig'rance. Ye never knew Captain Caleb Fish, likely, afore this morning, so I considers hit my duty ter tell ye about him."

For just a moment, the girl hesitated, a bit discon-

certed, but the twinkles in the old seafarers' eyes, as she glanced from one to another, reassured her.

"I think he's splendid," she hesitated, "and—"

"And probably a fine sea captain, too, eh? Huh!" Captain Lem stopped long enough to once more remove his cap by way of emphasis. "Well, now I kin tell ye—t'want so long ago—two—three weeks, likely, Captain Tony—" turning to his aged checker antagonist, who nodded assent.

"Three, I reckon," agreed the man whose day's sport had been spoiled, but whose face showed he expected recompense in what was to come.

"Yes, 't'war three weeks ago," Captain Lem stopped to shake the ash from his dead pipe. "Ye see, Cap'n Caleb thar, he thinks he's some navigator. Maybe he was when he went ter sea, but, wal, if he had to pass his examination now to get into this seaman's club, I hain't saying we wouldn't be shy a member."

It was Captain Caleb's turn to begin to look anxious. He shifted from one foot to the other, but he could not escape. As the self-appointed host of the visitors, he must stick it out.

"It was this way," went on the now unperturbed Captain Lem. "He was out in Cap'n Hen Berry's catboat, and the two on 'em was pluggin' along 'fore the wind, and abraggin' 'bout their navigatin'. Cap'n Caleb was at th' wheel and was a-sayin', 'Yes sir, I know every darn rock in this river,' and—and jest then they hit one, *shebang!* and Cap'n Caleb

said: 'And here's one on 'em now!' Navigator! Huh!"

Captain Lem threw back his head in a wild guffaw, as he rolled in his chair and clapped Captain Tony on the shoulders. Captain Caleb, his pleasant big face the color of the sunset that was a nightly sight from the club room windows, touched the girl's arm lightly.

"Come on," he whispered hoarsely, "he hain't responsible. 'T'wan't so!"

Captain Lem sat straight up in his chair, as he clapped his hat on his head, only to remove it again as quickly.

" 'T'wan't so, hey?" he snapped, but the vigor of his speech changed to a chortle of delight as he saw Captain Caleb's visage. " 'T'wan't so? Huh! Well, then, how 'bout that time you and the Spicer boy was out around Goshen Island, and the fog come up? Hey? Didn't ye git out yer chart and steer by compass? Ye made port all right, but what did that Spicer boy have to tell? Hadn't ye been navigatin' Goshen Sound with a chart of Narragansett Bay?"

Even the girl had to join in the laugh that went up after that, though she stopped immediately as she saw the reddened countenance of the man who had made her feel at home in this club of men into which she had stumbled under the impression that she would find a mixed gathering.

"By godfrey!" muttered Captain Caleb. "How could I see the derned old chart? I left my glasses to hum—"

Thoroughly satisfied with his revenge, Captain Lem turned to his partner.

"Think ye kin play a game now, without cheatin'?" he asked, as he began to arrange the checkers in the big black squares.

Outside, on the cracked flagged sidewalk before the club house door, Dorothy Merrill and her companion bade Captain Caleb Fish good-by.

"You don't know how much I thank you," she said. "You made me feel so—well, so not *unwanted*. And it's all so fine. You must have such wonderful times, don't you?"

Captain Caleb grinned.

"Well, we have an auxil'ry," he commented, with a meaning that was lost on the girl who did not as yet know the women of Bayport.

Ozra Hemingway, in gloomy fashion, was gazing from the window when he returned. The checker game had reached a point of danger as he could see by the way Captain Lem's hat was pulled down over his grizzled front hair. He sat down to watch.

"That thar is a derned nice girl," he offered. "Seems likely she'll be a credit to th' town when she gits 'quainted."

No reply from the battlers with the red and black.

From his vantage point in the window, Ozra Hemingway ejected his scornful "Huh!"

"Wimmin," said the little misogynist for the third time that morning, "is pizen. 'Tisn't more'n likely she's no diffr'nt from the rest. Young, too, and—"

"And being young and pretty is a crime in yer eyes, hain't it, Hemingway?" observed Captain Caleb as he arose and crossed to the other and stood looking down at him sternly. "No need to say who ye're thinkin' of, but I'm jest a-warnin' ye, ye're in shallow water when ye go making remarks in this club, and—"

"Wimmin's champeen!" sneered Ozra. "Ye can't scare me, Caleb Fish—I'll say what I'm a-mind ter, and when I say why don't True Tisdale's wife treat him like a married woman orter, why I—"

Captain Caleb Fish towered over the smaller man who, with small success, valiantly tried not to cower. He thundered at him.

"And who says she don't, hey? Who says she don't! Ye're in shallow water, Hemingway. Ye'd better git back into the channel. And if I hear ye—"

Ozra Hemingway turned to take up the marine glass. Without doubt, he did not care to continue the discussion further with Captain Caleb. But as he stalked toward the door the latter flung out his last word:

"Better keep yer post office gossip outer here, Hemingway," he advised. "Hit hain't noways healthy. And Martha Tisdale's name, too! She's good to look at—and young. And them's her *main* sins, so fer as I can see."

CHAPTER IV

FOR generations the captaincy of the lightship at Ripping Reef, that saw-toothed, treacherous ridge of rocks off the mouth of Bayport Harbor, had been in one family. As Captain Hen Berry once put it: "Th' Tisdales had been captains of the lightship ever since time."

In the memory of two decades of Bayport folks, old Silas Tisdale had been master of the vessel that rode at anchor out there, marking the rocks that meant death to any vessel coming up on them, and of the lights which were the beacon for sailormen far out to sea.

When Silas Tisdale died, it was but natural that his son, Trueman Tisdale, should be his successor, especially as he was accounted one of the best sailormen along the coast, a fact that had not been overlooked by the United States Lighthouse Board, when the subject of a new captain came before it.

"An' right desarvin' of hit he war, too," agreed Captain Caleb to his cronies in the Neptune Club, "seein' th' trainin' he had, for there hain't many sailormen nowadays kin boast of bein' a cabin boy at twelve, a sailor-before-th' mast at seventeen, and master's papers at twenty-one."

Ozra Hemingway, with a word, as always, to say

in disagreement with whomsoever was the speaker, slapped his suspender against his skinny breast, and spat into the sawdust-filled box that was doing duty as his personal cuspidor.

"They do say True Tisdale is sorter queer—" he insinuated.

Captain Caleb snorted his contempt as he fixed the small wizened ship's cook with his keen eye, "Queer, be he? Wal, he hain't no hand to gab, ef ye mean that—but I'm thinkin' hit wouldn't nowise do some others here'bouts no harm ter be queer in th' same way."

Ozra subsided, but not without a characteristic lift to his eyebrows, which always meant that there was much that he and he alone could tell, should he be so minded.

In a way, the club pessimist was right. Trueman Tisdale, among some, had come to be accounted queer, principally for the reason set forth by his champion, Captain Caleb Fish. The life of the sea had made him quiet, even reticent. A man does not come to take life lightly when he is accustomed to facing dangers of the deep daily and nightly as duty routine. Nor does he wear his heart upon his sleeve, though this does not mean that that heart has become atrophied. Could those who criticised have been able to look deep into the soul of Trueman Tisdale as he stood out on his lightship deck during his long hours of lonely watching, they would have been surprised at the gentleness, the forbearance, the deeply poetical feeling of which the man was

capable, and which the life he led had made to him a sort of religion; a philosopher, too, and one to whom patience was a virtue.

Tall, rugged, blue-eyed—a perfect specimen of that type of sailor who has been brought to perfection in no section as in New England—Trueman Tisdale was a man to attract attention wherever he went. It was but natural, then, that when he chose to go on his course, in his own quiet way, paying small attention to either the petty talk of the villagers, or to their opinions, he should come to be remarked among some of them as "queer."

To most of the Bayporters, in especial to such as Ozra Hemingway, and Trueman Tisdale's own stepmother, Ma Tisdale, as she was called by the entire community, silence was distinctly not a virtue. To others it was, to say the least, a relief. And more than once, had it been known, it was to Trueman Tisdale, with his clear eyes and his deep thinking and way of getting at the heart of a matter and its solution that other Bayporters had come with their difficulties.

Withal, though, Trueman Tisdale had only on one occasion gone contrary to the advice of both friends and critics. That was when he had married.

They had argued; they had pleaded—they had prophesied—but ignoring them equally, Trueman Tisdale had quietly gone about having his own way, and had married Martha Rogers, the motherless daughter of a shiftless ne'er-do-well fisherman.

Not that there was anything inherently wrong

with Martha. It was just that she was generally not approved by the ruling members of Bayport's church and social set who lived so closely to the rules of conduct laid down unerringly by such Puritanical sharp-tongued arbiters as Ma Tisdale.

No one could have said exactly why Martha was disapproved, but Captain Caleb Fish probably had the right of the matter when he told Ozra Hemingway that her sins consisted in being young and good to look at. Those were sins, too, that it was difficult for many a matron—and maid, too—of Bayport to forgive.

Old Pete Rogers had dropped out of Bayport's existence some time before the marriage of his daughter to Trueman Tisdale. Some said he was dead. Martha sighed when she heard it, and went on hoping that it was not true, and that some day he would come back to her. For whatever the old fisherman might have been, however his ways may have been such that his daughter could have no social position in her home town, she loved him.

Martha Rogers had had little to love in the short years of her life—a fact which probably accounted all the more for the passionate adoration she bestowed on her husband, for it was with the eagerness of a starved heart that the young girl had gone to the man who offered her the first gift of disinterested devotion she had ever known. Martha Rogers, pretty and alone, had not wanted for the attention that one in her position is sure to have. In general,

though, the attentions that had been showered on her, the admiration the youth of the town had bestowed on her, had been offered with a sort of shamefacedness, a clandestine suggestion that she had not failed to sense, however eager she may have been for the attentions that are the rightful homage any young and pretty girl may expect.

It was Captain Hen Berry who came forward as Martha Tisdale's champion one day at the post office where the usual crowd was gathered waiting for the opening of the mail—a ceremony as far as old Jerry Decker, the postmaster was concerned, for it was with a deliberation that might better have fitted a languorous Southerner instead of a grizzled Grand Army man that the old soldier put one letter or post card at a time into its rightful cubby hole, stopping to scan not only addresses, but usually to gather a hint of what the communication might be about.

Martha Tisdale had fluttered into the center of the somewhat hostile-eyed crowd, demure and pretty in her crisp pink organdie, with the air her clothes had, even though it was known that she made them herself. The discussion of the affairs of the Auxiliary which was at full tilt came to a sudden halt at her appearance. Ma Tisdale's nose went up in the air a trifle higher as Martha unlocked the Tisdale box—a right Ma had claimed as her own for years before the appearance of another in her home who had more claim to being its mistress. Mehitable Sands, the spinster sister of Jonas Sands, another

self-appointed guardian of the public morals, nudged Ma significantly.

Unheeding, Martha turned and departed, her eyes on the circular which she was opening.

Mehitable sniffed.

"Too uppity since she married True Tisdale to notice common folks, eh?" she rasped.

Captain Hen turned his head from the paper he was perusing and looked Mehitable up and down over the tops of his square-framed glasses. His hand turned instinctively to his whiskers.

"What would ye have done had she took notice, Mehitable?" he asked. "Snubbed her, most likely, and that poor gal's jest had about enough of snubbin', I cal'late, eh?"

Miss Sands' sniff became almost a snort. She started to speak, but Ma Tisdale took the words out of her mouth.

"So ye're jest a fool like the rest of the men, are ye, Hen Berry?" she snapped. "Takin' up for the daughter of that no-good Rogers! Humph! That flip, little empty-headed no-account, I call her; not the wife for any level-headed man—"

Captain Hen's eyes shifted to view the group of tittering young women who were undisguisedly enjoying the flaying of the prettier young woman who was strolling down the street.

"What you wimmin got agin Martha Tisdale, anyhow?" he asked, his eyes and accents taking in the whole of the gathered gossipers. "I'll tell ye, if ye want to know! Martha Rogers up and married

True Tisdale, that's why, and he was the best ketch in this hull town! Huh!"

He turned to stump away, unheeding the baleful glances that were cast at his retreating figure.

"Fools!" Ma Tisdale found voice to cast her shaft at the unheeding Captain Berry who was hurrying off to catch up with Martha Tisdale. "Fools!" she repeated, as the post office group saw the stumpy old captain fall in step with the girl who turned to give him a smile of eager greeting. "All men! Caught by a pretty face! Beats all, though," she bewailed as she turned to her sympathizers, "how a big sensible man like True lets himself be took in by a pretty face and a scheming head."

Mehitable Sands' head wagged vigorously on her long scrawny neck as she agreed.

"Doll's face; doll's morals, I say," she offered lugubriously. "There hain't no such thing."

"Tush!" It was the voice of Mrs. Caleb Fish, who looked up from her sister Myra's letter and the long description of the twins' illness to offer her bit. "Tush, Mehitable! Ye're always looking for onions in the sugar bowl! Martha's jest a girl like any other. My part, I think we had ought to vote her into the club."

Mehitable's outraged gasp was echoed by Ma Tisdale and in lesser degree by the lesser lights about her.

"Into the Auxiliary!" It was almost a scream. "Anastasia Fish, are ye clean looney! Old Pete Rogers' girl?"

Mrs. Anastasia Fish shook out the folds of her ample gown over her ample figure, as she readjusted her nose glasses. "Oh, well, all right, have it your own way," she answered with a shrug of her shoulders. "I don't know, after all, but what she'll thrive just as well on the smell of her own kitchen as she would on the kind of milk of human kindness that sloshes around in the Auxiliary."

As usual, it was Ozra Hemingway who had the last word. Across his wizened face passed what he firmly believed to be a smile—a knowing smile.

"Ye jest wait," he prophesied, with a wag of his head. "That's all I've got to say—jest wait."

For the first time in many a moon, Ma Tisdale's vigorous nod agreed with him who had been her chief antagonist. Ma Tisdale wasn't caring where she got allies as far as Martha was concerned, for Trueman Tisdale had married Martha against her bitter opposition and she was in no mind either then or ever to become reconciled to the situation that had deposed her from head of the Tisdale household, which position she had held during long years of the lifetime of Trueman's father, and had held on as housekeeper for her step-son until the coming of Martha.

For some time now Trueman had been able to stop his stepmother's outbreaks in his presence, for Ma Tisdale had known he meant it when he had told her in his quiet, forceful way, with that level glance she knew so well:

"Martha is my wife, Ma. I treat my wife with

respect—others must do the same. She suits me, and—er—if you're not suited, why—"

Even while she seethed inwardly, Ma Tisdale knew, as Mrs. Anastasia Fish put it, "which side her bread was buttered on," and so, though she put a curb on her tongue whenever Trueman was home—which wasn't often as he spent much of his time aboard his lightship—but when she was alone with Martha or with her bosom companions, such as Mehitable Sands—Well, there were more ways than one of making the unwanted little bride's life miserable.

Ma Tisdale wasn't Ma Tisdale for nothing, nor had she gained her reputation for shrewishness without having given much thought and practice to the tongue that ever stood her in stead. Indeed, she felt not only relief, but got positive enjoyment from all her opportunities to talk over Martha's shortcomings.

So, however much his neighbors may have caviled, however much his sharp-tongued stepmother had argued, and railed and plead with angry tears to aid her, Trueman Tisdale had pleased himself and married the girl who had won his gentle, simple heart. He had brought her to live in the little white house down on the point overlooking the ocean, the quaint home down the shore road from Bayport that had housed generations of Tisdales, and from the windows and small porch of which the lightship could be seen across the spread of waters as it rocked at anchor.

Martha Tisdale was proud of that little home—

almost as proud of it as she was of the handsome sailor man she had come to love so deeply, but of whom, sometimes, she was still a bit afraid. It seemed to Martha these times that she had never been able to creep as deeply into the heart of her husband as she wished. Emotional herself, demonstrative, too, in the way of a stray kitten that is starved for affection, Martha Tisdale often wished that Trueman would show her in some other way than his quiet-matter-of-course fashion that he loved her.

Could she have peeped into the heart of the man she had married, she would have seen herself enthroned there. But Trueman Tisdale was not the man to show what meant more to him than the wide world. Marriage to him was a sacrament, a literal taking for better or for worse, but in his simple soul there never crept the thought that there could be any worse where Martha was concerned.

Even during the days of his courtship, he had shown his love principally by the brightness of his eye and the lightness of his step, and after marriage he had set about living as though he were newly born, and that part of that new birth included Martha, his wife, the one big thing that made life worth living.

Had he but been able to put this in words! But Martha Tisdale would look at him with those big adoring eyes; would wish for a gentle caress—a touch on the cheek—but they did not come. Trueman's perfunctory farewell kiss when he left her to go to the lightship was the greatest emotional heights to which he had ever risen.

Still, though love was not being fulfilled the way the romantically dreaming girl had always believed it would be, should it come to her, the old fisherman's daughter would have been supremely happy had it not been for her incubus, Ma Tisdale, and the hundreds of petty ways she found to make the young wife uncomfortable. And one other thing—accustomed as she had always been from childhood to knowing herself an outsider where the social life of Bayport was concerned, she had fondly believed that, on her marriage to one as firmly established as Trueman Tisdale, that all this would be changed. Wherein she reckoned without Ma Tisdale, or Mehitable Sands, or Ozra Hemingway, or of a dozen lesser lights who so jealously guarded the portals of Bayport society in a way that would have done honor to arbiters of a society in a far more pretentious community. Once a fisherman's daughter, always a fisherman's daughter. Once the object of gossip, no matter how innocent she may have been in allowing herself to be admired, always so. Such had been the decree of Bayport's upholders of sanctity.

So Martha Tisdale had ceased even her timid hesitating advances to be among the elect of the village, and settled down in her home on the point where her vigils over the lightship offshore were quite as unceasing as were those of the sturdy captain of it whose clear blue eyes swept the alternating stormy and calm waters about him.

CHAPTER V

IT was a quaint home—but pretty. Summer visitors were certain to exclaim with delight, when they came over from the big hotel across the river, to stroll or ride down the river road for the view of the sea from that vantage point—and, perhaps, a glimpse of the lightship.

One came upon the Tisdale house from a rounding curve. For about half way up the lane, after leaving the highway, beautiful poplar trees lined the walk. The trees were like sentinels—unbending sentinels, grave and dignified in their waxen-green uniforms. In their sturdy guardianship they were reminiscent of glistening frost and whirring winter winds.

The house sat high so that the dust of the road seemed never to touch it. The front, while facing the sea and its rigors, was protected from blasty southeasters, by the high barrier of the little rocky knoll at the extreme point of the headland, and by a thin fringe of dwarfed cedars, which extended along the seaward front. The cedars paused for about a hundred feet directly opposite the dwelling, as if a beneficent nature intended the vista to be unobstructed—only to continue their scrawny growth when the house was passed.

Seaward the land dropped abruptly to a stony beach, which was reached by a wooden stairway, leading from a spacious platform at the top. This platform served as an observation station from where the marine view was beautiful. Passing to the eastward around the headland and toward the harbor, the land gradually sloped to the whiter sandy beach of a sheltered tiny cove, where Trueman Tisdale moored his small boat when it was too rough to land at the outer beach. A pebbly pathway led windingly from the little cove to the house.

The house itself was clean and white, and with an indescribable air of wisdom that houses that have set in one place for ages seem to acquire. It was a wise little old structure that had looked out over the sea, and witnessed the comings and goings of ships from the time of bravely sailing whalers with billowing sails down to the present day when it watched modern packets making their dignified way along the coast.

Its two wings, at either end, were welcoming arms reaching out to sea in front, where ships passed, or toward the road in the rear where travelers journeyed. It had seen storms and sunshine; its weathered timbers said that—but it was trim and white and shipshape—just what one might expect in the home of a careful sailing master.

In the day-time, the green blinds toward the sea were closed, so that the sun should not heat the rooms that faced the glare of the sea and sunshine. In front of its porch, where Martha's hammock was

swung, filled with her sewing and the magazines and books with which she loved to beguile herself, was a huge flat slab of stone. It was polished by the feet of generations, and kept washed and as spick as the "tidies" that adorned the upholstered backs of the chairs in the "sittin' room"—chairs that had come across the seas, brought there at different times by the sailorman occupants from far parts of the earth, as also had been the mahogany furniture and the glazed blue dishes that still stood in such sprightly manner on the high sideboard in the little dining room.

Summer visitors did not often get a glimpse of that furniture in the Tisdale home, for old Silas had put a stop to it a long time before, when some portly, importunate matrons had tried to buy it right out from under his feet. Nor did Trueman Tisdale open his home to outsiders, who had to content themselves with the view from where the road ended and led up the private lane to the little house, and wonder if it could be possible that the interior fittings of the place could fit its exterior.

On the left side of the land and extending around to the seaward side of the house, clumps of zinnias, four-o'clocks and neatly-made beds of asters, bordered with sweet alyssum, were set out, forming a riot of brilliant colors. Around the inside of the garden tall hollyhocks stood guard. Nature intended the garden as a stalking place of romance, its beauty speaking of a day when a long-gone young

New England housewife, in her honeymoon days, made her posey-bed of love looking out to sea.

At the opposite end of the dwelling was the kitchen or truck garden, screened from the highway by rows of hollyhocks and sun flowers. This garden was Trueman Tisdale's chief delight.

It had not been in him to become a stay-at-home—to give up the sea altogether, when he was married. And so he had compromised by taking the position of captain of the lightship.

Many an old salt would have thought this a sinecure, but there were more lonely days and nights for Trueman Tisdale—anchored out in the sea in one small spot, when he had been used to skimming along on vast surfaces, communing with his own spirit and with the god of the deep—than he even admitted to himself.

It would be unbearable if Trueman had had a less poetical nature. He loved books, and he loved the solitudes during which he analyzed his readings. To him there was much in the curl of a wave, the winging of a bird, or the formation of a fleecy cloud. He loved his O. Henry, and to him there was a world of meaning in the sentence: "As I stood on the beach, a long row of portholes flashed by, in the night." It was given him, as with the author, to see much that passed him by in the night.

Excepting when on "shore leave," most of Trueman's nights were spent aboard his lightship. And he knew nothing of the yearning with which the girl on the shore, whom he loved, was watching the

flickering lights far out there, while she swung in her hammock and dreamed of the things that might be, if her husband loved her more—but were not. She liked to realize that the blinds were thrown open wide—she loved to think of the windows as twinkling lights not intended to be sombered by opaque shades, but as shining signals of love that Trueman would see, and get their import.

It was possible for Trueman to come ashore whenever he wished, according to his arrangement with the Government—and every third week was his to do with as he chose. No one knew of the quiet delight of those periods ashore—no one save the birds with which he communed as he worked in his kitchen garden and watched the flutter of Martha's blue or pink ginghams as she flew about her housework, singing in the exuberance of her high spirits that the man she loved was near. The birds, and the clouds that formed their mother-of-pearl mountains over the sea in front of his home, were her inspiration.

The red and yellow and purple reflections were settling themselves above the deep blue of the ocean's horizon when Martha one June evening opened the blinds and arranged the shades of the windows that overlooked the water. Even in stormy weather she would arrange her unanswered love signals. But their being closed did not prevent many a trip to the little porch where she stood with hand curved over her eyes, watching for any sign from the lightship.

Martha sighed gently as she pulled back the white curtains that the breeze might blow through the rooms that had been darkened through the day. "To-morrow," she whispered, and a glad light leapt into her eyes. To-morrow Trueman would come in off the lightship and he had promised her he would stay two whole days. There was so much she wanted to tell him, and so much she wanted to beg of him, too. Martha Tisdale had decided to risk all on one throw, and to-morrow she had decided that she would plead with her husband to leave the lightship and to come ashore and be with her all the time.

As she stood for a moment at the white-casemented window, she smiled at something she remembered—something that would be sure to please Trueman. He had been experimenting in the garden—had planted something Ma Tisdale called "new-fangled stuff"—and he would be so delighted to know that it was up. Swiss chard, he called it, and she was anxious for it to grow so that she might experiment in cooking it for him. She must see how it was coming on. She turned from the window and a moment more the back door of the little house—the door leading directly from the kitchen with its low windows and wide spaces, its woven rugs and bright cushioned rush bottomed chairs—opened and she sped out into the garden. She bent over the tiny green shoots that were bravely struggling through the mold. Then she straightened up with a start.

"Good evening," came in a clear voice, an unfamiliar, but welcomely pleasant voice to Martha

Tisdale who was not accustomed to be addressed in pleasant tones by a woman's voice. She looked about her, and a smile came into her eyes as she saw the face of the girl who was peeping through the hollyhocks, smiling with one to match her own.

"Good evening," she answered, but with an odd little repression that the girl in the white frock who was framed in the hollyhocks did not miss. "Are you—er—"

"Lost? Well, not exactly. Intruding, maybe, but not lost. I came of my own free will because I wanted to see this house I had heard so much about and I wanted to know you, too. You see—"

"I see," Martha Tisdale's smile was rueful. "You had heard so much about me, too, and—you're the boarder up at Mrs. Lou Barzum's, ain't you?"

The other nodded. "Yes, I'm Dorothy Merrill, and I did want to see you because I'd heard—well, I'd heard you were so—lovely!" She looked closely at the flushed face of Martha Tisdale, as she turned it toward the bay as though for quick guidance. "He was right, too," she went on eagerly. "He may be black, but he can see straight. Isn't he a queer character, that old fish peddler?"

Martha Tisdale's expression changed.

"Oh," she remarked, with an odd inflection. "You mean Shiner!" There was something of relief in her tones, but a tinge of bitterness as she went on: "It was well for me, I imagine, that you got your information about me from him—there are others in Bayport—" But she broke off quickly, and then,

after another glance at the eagerly friendly face of the other girl she finished timidly, as though in fear of a refusal: "Won't you come around and sit on the porch awhile? The sunset's lovely to-night."

It was just the invitation that Dorothy Merrill had hoped for when she left Jack at the boarding house after supper and had set off down the dusty road to the Tisdale home. She did want to know Martha Tisdale, and it was Dorothy Merrill's way to go after what she wanted. She had not been exactly frank with Martha in telling her she had heard about her from Shiner, the negro fish peddler, who was one of the curiosities of the village—Shiner with his good nature who was never known to speak ill of anyone, whose quaint philosophy of life and advice were peddled from door to door with all the earnestness with which he peddled his fish.

She had heard of her from other quarters, but, far from making her take the other side of the road, as had been the intention of her advisers, what she had heard had made her want all the more to know Martha Tisdale. Now that she saw her, Dorothy's warm heart went out to the girl. What cats they were! Why, she didn't believe one word of what they said! If there was ever a girl who needed a friend, she decided impetuously, in her warm-hearted way, here was one. She wanted to be her friend. She determined she would be.

For a good quarter of an hour, the two girls sat in the swing on the Tisdale porch, talking of the

many things which such girls can find to interest them, no matter how remote may be their interests.

"You must be so happy here," enthused Dorothy, as she at last arose when the twilight shades began to lengthen. "I don't know when I've ever seen a house that was so—well, so booky."

She did not see the quick glance to seaward that Martha flashed.

"Is the inside just as beautiful as the outside?" she went on. "They tell me you have some wonderful old things from, oh, everywhere!"

Martha thought quickly. She knew both Ma Tisdale's and Trueman's aversion to showing their home, but Ma Tisdale was not at home. Surely this one—And such a lovely girl—She held out her hand to Dorothy.

"Would you care to see it?" she asked.

In a way to delight a home lover's heart, Dorothy Merrill praised everything she saw in the little sitting room, from the hooked rugs to the clipper model with its bellied sails above the mantel shelf. But in particular she loved the little old fashioned piano that sat primly in its corner. She ran her fingers lightly over the yellow keys.

"I suppose you amuse yourself playing a lot—and dreaming?" she asked, but Martha shook her head.

"No," she answered simply, "I—I never had much chance—" Her thoughts flashed back to the dingy fisherman's cabin on the waterfront, with its clutter of nets and drying seaweed and odor of de-

caying fish that had been her home before Trueman Tisdale had married her and brought her here to live. But Dorothy was going on. She sat on the slippery piano stool and her fingers picked up a chord.

"This piano," she said, "why everything here reminds me of an old song. Let's see, I used to know one—"

Softly she began to sing

"—and it touched the faded arras,
And again I seemed to see
The lovely lady sitting there,
Her lover at her knee;
And I saw him kiss her fair white hand,
And oh, I heard him say:
I shall love thee, dear, forever,
Though the years may pass away—"

There was a catch in Martha Tisdale's throat as she listened. Did men love like that? She wondered. Her eyes turned to the window through which she could catch the first glimpse of the lights Trueman Tisdale was starting, out aboard the lightship. Dorothy Merrill did not hear her as she repeated the last two lines in a whisper:

"I shall love thee, dear, forever,
Though the years may pass away—"

CHAPTER VI

"Oh, Santa Anna was a fighting man;
Hurrah for Santa Anna!
He fought all night and he fought all day—
'Long the plains of Mex-i-co . . .
'Long the plains of—"

CAPTAIN HEN BERRY stopped short in the chantey he was bellowing—the favorite chantey of the Neptuners—as he rolled up to the clubhouse door and, taking a nautical hitch in his loose trousers, his right hand clutching his whiskers, he let forth a hail:

"Ship a-h-o-y! Helloo, 'b-o-a-r-d th' brig!"

The fat little sailorman listened for a moment; then cupped his hands for a louder challenge.

"What ship's that—"

From inside came an answering hail, and Captain Hen nodded satisfaction.

"Ship Nancy Ann, Cap'n Scratch—three decks and no bottom—"

Captain Hen again challenged.

"Whar' ye bound?"

Without hesitation came the response:

"Hong Kong, China, with a load er bung-holes—"

The door at the top of the steps leading to the club rooms flew open and the burly form of Captain

Caleb stood there as he gave his answer. He waved a big hand at Captain Hen, as he commanded:

"Come 'board, ye durned old fool—come 'board."

Captain Hen rolled into the room and looked about him. It was deserted save for the two checker players, who were hard at their daily battle, and Captain Caleb Fish who felt it his duty to be on hand on such occasions, when an umpire was certain to be needed.

As if the atmosphere of the club and the sight of his old shipmates reminded him of something he could not altogether forget, Captain Hen's face clouded.

Captain Caleb did the honors, with a mock dignity, pretending it was Captain Hen's first visit to the club.

"Haul up a cheer and sit," he offered, with a wave of his big hand. "Glad to hav' ye 'board."

Then noticing for the first time the rotund skipper's serious mein, his facetiousness disappeared.

"What's on yer mind, Hen?"

The other chewed vigorously on his cud for a moment, and spat unerringly into the nearest cuspidor. The usual cheerful smile did not break out.

"Wimmin," announced Captain Hen, and he bit off the word with such unaccustomed vigor that Captain Caleb's chuckle died in his throat.

"By godfrey!" Again Captain Caleb's favorite

sea oath. "Don't ye go a'tellin' me that Mehitable Sands—" He was stopped by a gesture from his friend.

"Belay thar!" ordered Captain Hen. "I didn't say *wo*-man—I said *wimmin*—and thar be some in this town—"

Captain Caleb nodded his assent understandingly.

" 'Most important ye know how ter handle 'em," he agreed, with a wise wagging of his head. "Now, there's my Anastasia—trims ship like the meekest, best-behaved craft ye ever want to see, but—" he paused to give emphasis, "but in a seaway, blast if she kain't take on like a blamed old shootin' battleship."

Captain Caleb paused with a quick glance toward his old shipmate.

"But that hain't sayin' which of 'em's a-worryin' you in particular this morning. Has Mehitable—"

Captain Hen actually scowled, which was quite unusual for him. Nobody knew better than the members of the Neptune Club that if they wanted to see a black look replace the sunshine on the old sailor's face, all they had to do was to mention the name of Mehitable Sands.

The fact that Captain Hen had never married was in no-wise the fault of that angular spinster. Not even her famous deep-dish apple pies, so freely proffered—Captain Hen often wondered why "orner'y wimmin were sech bully good cooks"—to say nothing of her friendship so generously held out, had ever been able to soften the heart of the former sea

captain, as far as was concerned the gangling Mehitable with her serpent's tongue.

"Livin' with Mehitable would be some like takin' a dash of vitriol with yer meals," Captain Hen had been heard to remark once, which was probably the most vitriolic remark that had ever passed his lips.

So, when Captain Caleb started in to josh him about Mehitable, he was not surprised. Nor was he in a mood to argue. Neither did he resent it. All of which was proof enough that something of far greater importance was troubling the philosopher of Bayport.

He leaned back in his chair and tip-tilted it against the wall, as he surveyed his friend with an expression of solemnity on his round good-humored face.

"We had ought to do something about hit," he remarked.

Captain Caleb nodded. "Right," he agreed. "'Bout what?"

The answer was not direct.

"Jest come from down the river road," he remarked. "Come past Mis Lou Barzum's boarding house. Craft hailed me—trimmest craft seen 'bout these parts in many a long day, 'less ye 'cept Martha Tisdale."

"By godfrey!" Again Captain Caleb's inevitable oath. "Goes by the name of Dorothy—Dorothy Merrill. What's she done?"

But the other was not ready to say. He just went on: "Seen some from over at the big hotel on the

P'int that was some lookers, but this one—wal, now, them trim craft from over at the hotel, ye can smell 'em a mile, all talc and odor about 'em ye'd think ye was off Ceylon's spicy breezes as the hymn says. But this one—say, thar's a smell about her like wood vi'lets in a teacup, like the wistaria vine over my cabin porch in the moonlight."

"Ye're driftin'," said Captain Caleb.

Captain Hen caught himself.

"As I was sayin'," he went on, not noticing the interruption, as he reached into his deep pocket and took out a twist of tobacco from which he took a fresh chew, "I was comin' along by Mis Lou Barzum's with all sails set when this Dorothy craft hailed me. Plain she had somethin' on her mind. 'Cap'n Hen,' she said, 'I've been hearin' about you, and I wanted to see ye.' 'Wal, here I be,' says I. 'Did ye want I should make ye a little brigantine?' But she didn't laugh. 'I jest wanted to talk to you about somethin', somebody,' says she, 'and they told me you were the one could most like fix hit. Hit's about Martha,' says she, 'Martha Tisdale.' "

"First off I 'lowed she war tryin' to say somethin' 'bout that pore girl, same as some other waggin' tongues hereabouts be a-doin', and I 'low I warn't partic'lar cordial. 'Wal, what about her?' says I. 'She's cryin',' says she, 'leastways she was a while ago, and hit's all on account of some wimmin in town that are sayin' things about her, and she finer than any of 'em, but they don't want her in their old club. Oh, the horrid mean things,' says she, 'I could kill

'em.' 'Then' says I, 'I 'low ye wouldn't be in much danger of being tuck up for murder if ye did kill a few sarpints,' says I, 'but what kin I do?' Then she says as how she kinder hoped you and me, we might git them wimmin to let Martha in the club, fer she is pinin' so—"

Captain Hen stopped, pulled his chin fringe, and chewed more vigorously. It was a long speech for him, but Captain Caleb knew his mate, and he knew how much it had hurt him to hear of Martha Tisdale's trouble.

"By godfrey!" Captain Caleb interjected. "I 'low she don't know much about the wimmin in this here club, effen she thinks we kin do anything with 'em. Jest the same, hit's a shame, and—"

Captain Lem shoved his last checker over to another square—the game had reached an exciting finale, but he took time to stop long enough to put in his oar. He had at least heard the word "Wimmin."

"Wimmin," he growled, "was bad enuff before they got the vote. Then they only bossed around the house. Now they think they've a call to boss the whole derned world. Hey, there!" he broke off to Captain Tony, "d'ye think I'm not watching ye, ye old rope walloper."

"This here club went on the rocks proper when we let the wimmin in, Caleb," he offered, ignoring his checker opponent for once.

"Dunno's we let 'em in none," came the rueful response of the big captain. "I 'low they jest sort

of scudded in when we didn't have no lookout. Yes, yes, ye're right. This club hain't what it uster be. Was the time when it was a snug harbor when seas were runnin' high ter hum—but when we come here now, the wimmin they come too, and they bring the seas right in with 'em." Disconsolately he ran his fingers through his scraggly locks in a gesture of despair.

"Can't even spit on the floor no more!" exploded Captain Tony, as he fired at an ornate spit box which had been one of the first contributions of the Auxiliary to the club house. "Talk about reformin', once a man could speak his mind right out here same's on shipboard. Now we've got to double-reef our lingo like pesky landlubbers. We've—"

"Got ter keep yer coat on—got ter keep your hat off—" Captain Lem's lament was all but a groan. "It's hell!" he moved his lone checker another space forward.

Captain Hen Berry shifted his position as he shifted his cud. His eyes were on a picture of Ma Tisdale that now adorned the wall, having been put in place by the Woman's Auxiliary, who thus sought to honor the woman who had been most responsible for their even having become a part of the club. He scowled as he looked, then turned from it as from something most unpleasant.

The subject of women being in this, a sea-faring man's club, had for the moment switched his thoughts from the wrongs at their hands of another woman whom he sought to champion—a woman he

had known since she was a little girl, and over whom he had watched tenderly during those years after her fisherman-father's disappearance until she had anchored in what he believed and hoped was the safe harbor of wifehood and Trueman Tisdale's love.

The club, however, was his obsession. He felt toward it as a mother toward a child, for he had been one of the original members before the organization had attained the dignity of the regular club rooms it now occupied there in that old West Indy warehouse. His head wagged disconsolately, as his half circle of whiskers marked time.

"Right ye be, boys, right ye be," he averred. "Was a time when we old fellers steered this craft, makin' harbor when we was a mind ter, droppin' our anchor where we would. But we've had ter give up the idee. Hit's a heep sight comfortabler, leastwise fer me, ter listen to th' wimmin tryin' to decide who's to handle the wheel—"

"And failin' ter agree," interrupted Captain Caleb.

It was old Captain Tony who made a suggestion. He shifted his cud from one cheek to the other and looked about to see that none was near but his cronies. Then in a whisper, as he leaned forward, he asked: "Have you given any thought we might throw 'em out?"

Captain Caleb's chuckle ended in a roar of derisive laughter.

"By godfrey! That's a mighty fine thought, Tony," he laughed, "but it hain't practical. Ye see, we

jest been plain pirated, that's what we be, and while they hain't been no black flag run up, we're down under the hatches, and we hain't got no chance. No, siree, the flag that's been run up on the topmast of this craft is a petticoat with an egg beater and saucepan rampant. We hain't been asked to walk no plank yet, nor we hain't been keelhauled, but we got to walk a pretty straight chalk-line jest the same, and I 'low ye hain't give it much thought, Tony, when ye talk about throwin' out sech fee-males as Ma Tisdale when she's got her hand on the wheel."

Captain Lem pushed back his chair from the table with its checker board and stared gloomily into space.

"D'ye know," his voice at last cut into the sad silence that had followed the words of Captain Caleb, "the wimmin in this club remind me of a three-master built back in the 'Eighties, jest across the harbor." He jerked his thumb in the direction of the club windows as he went on: "Trimmest craft I ever see, before they jerked her blocks away; good lines, good workmanship, everything good that makes a ship, or oughter. But when she took ter water, she seemed to think, like these here wimmin think, that bein' contrary is part of the fee-male make-up—fact!" he added, as his eyes roved over the faces of his companions to see whether there lingered on one a doubt of the truth of his words.

"We sorter figured with that ship it was the nature of the sex and it would wear off when she got used to the rudder. But, 'nope!' when she got her full

riggin' there warn't no holdin' her. She was as perky as Eve in the Garden with a new dress."

"Tarnation! New dresses!" Captain Hen Berry sat up straight as the words exploded from him. They brought back to his mind what had been troubling him when he had "come aboard the Nancy Ann" as Captain Caleb had characterized the club. "They kin make a heap of trouble. Now, t'wouldn't s'prise me one bit ef them fee-males that is makin' Martha Tisdale cry wasn't jest jealous of all them new doo-dads True Tisdale's been a-hangin' on her, and that makes her so trim and pretty. What say, Caleb—you 'low we kin do anything to make 'em change their minds 'bout Martha's bein' in the club. Don't know's I kin—I tried. When I come along from Mis Barzum's I run spang inter Ma Tisdale and a couple of others headed for the post office, and I kinder passed the time o' day, and hinted some, but Ma Tisdale, she jest looked me over like I was some sort of pizen and she 'lowed: 'Ye're too old to be sich a fool, Hen Berry; you don't know what ye're talkin' about. Seems like hit's bad enough I have to have sich a critter right in my home, but I hain't goin' to impose her on my Christian neighbors."

" 'Why, what's the matter with Martha, Ma?' I asked her, but her nose went right up in the air, and she remarks, spiteful, 'Matter 'nough,' she snaps out at me. 'You just wait till ye know all—' and with that she hikes out toward the post office."

"I 'low she's holding forth up there right this

minnit, and Lord knows what them fee-males and that old rooster of a Ozra Hemingway are cacklin' and crowin' about right now."

Captain Caleb's head jerked around to the door as a clatter came from beyond the threshold.

"Now, I wonder what she meant?" he inquired of the world at large. "More'n likely they're cookin' up some new kind of trouble for that poor little wife of True Tisdale's, that never done 'em no harm. 'Pears as though we might be a-goin' to find out right soon, though," he added, with his sage nod. "For unless my ears deceive me that's Oz Hemingway comin' aboard now, and he's in a hurry."

Captain Tony's line of a mouth opened to a toothless grin. But there was no answering one on the faces of Captain Caleb or of Captain Hen. Well they knew what it meant when Ozra, the idle, was in a hurry. One thing and one thing alone would increase his usual snail-like speed. Ozra was in possession of some new scandal. And he wanted to disseminate it as quickly as possible. It was plain to them, too, that almost every one in town must know what his new choice tidbit was, for Ozra would never have left the post office were there anything still there to learn, or any one to listen to him. Members of the Neptune Club were always last to hear from the old-time sea cook, and he would not have come there had there been any one else to whom to talk.

The door of the club flew open and Ozra clattered into the room. About him was an air of suppressed

excitement. Something out of the ordinary had occurred, it was plain. But, aside from a grumble in general greeting, he did not for a moment speak. He threw his old greasy cap into the wood-box and sat down. He tilted his chair back against the wall and looked about him. The checker players had finished their game and were engaged in their usual climactic argument, their revilings of each other and promises never to play with each other again, a promise always religiously kept—until the next day.

Captain Caleb Fish muttered his usual oath and strolled over to the window, busying himself in making a new adjustment of the marine glass. Then he walked back slowly to stand in front of Ozra Hemingway, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and swayed on the balls of his feet before the small man. "Well, Oz," he commanded, "out with hit! What is hit this time—the hull darned congregation throwin' stones, eh? Must be somethin' pretty excitin'. What do ye know?"

The former sea cook attempted an unconcerned yawn.

"Oh, nuthin'," he said. "Nuthin' new, that is—"

But he had held in as long as he could. There was suppressed excitement in his tones, as he went on, after a minute—an eagerness that was not lost on his hearers who knew him so well. "Don't know whether ye've noticed it," he offered, "but they's a newcomer in town. Jest seen him awhile ago myself—"

"Yes?" Captain Caleb's tone was more than inquiring. He knew the small wizened gossip-monger was getting at something that would not be pleasant in the finding out.

"Yes" Ozra nodded, and a light of joy was in his little eyes. Ozra was enjoying himself. "Nate Sanderson's back again."

And he was altogether satisfied when he saw the looks of consternation that spread over the countenances of his hearers.

"Damn!" exploded Captain Hen with unusual fervor. "If that ——"

But Ozra went on without noticing the interruption.

"Comin' 'long th' River Road a spell back— And I seen him with my own eyes. He was paradin' like a play hero, down the road near the P'int, with True Tisdale's wife and that little overdressed city chit that's stayin' at Mis' Lou Barzum's."

"Damn!" The outburst was a duet from Captain Caleb and Captain Hen. But it was Captain Hen who broke in. "What of it? Hain't two young wimmin got a right to walk down a road in broad daylight with a man they know?"

Ozra, however, was not to be deterred.

"All right," he whined, "we'll see—we'll see! Hain't I bin a-tellin' ye all th' time you kain't expect nuthin' from th' daughter of——"

There appeared a dangerous glint in the eyes of Captain Caleb as he interrupted the little gossip.

"Come 'bout, Hemingway," he growled. "Ye're

headed toward breakers. You let Martha's father alone. Th' least ye can do is to have a little Christian charity——"

But Ozra was not to be squelched too easily. He was rolling his newest morsel of gossip under his tongue, and was enjoying the flavor.

"Ye kain't say he was any ornament to the town, when he was livin', can ye?" he asked.

Captain Hen snorted.

"Mebby a lazy fisherman hain't exactly an ornament," he observed, but his eye was fixed on Ozra meaningly as he went on: "Nuther is a trash can an ornament, and I 'low they be 'bout as many trash cans in this here community as they be sweet smellin' flowers."

Ozra gave an angry flit to his shoulders. "Anyways, his daughter's married to True Tisdale, and that's the only reason she's tolerated around here—"

"And I say True Tisdale got a mighty fine young woman," Captain Caleb broke in. "No one's goin' to say a gol-derned thing about True Tisdale or his wife, leastwise while I'm around."

Ozra's answer was a sneer, as Captain Hen interrupted hotly: "True Tisdale's wife loves him—" he nodded vigorously, "and she's reaching out for the same kind of love—not the canned kind. Maybe it would be better ef True wasn't quite so good; more pitchin' and tossin'. There wouldn't be half the need for preachers, if devils warn't so kind of 'pealin'—"

Ozra rose from his chair with a lift to his shoulders that was expressive.

"Now, ye jest tell me this, Caleb Fish," and he thrust his face forward into the scowling one of the big captain, "ef that Rogers gal is so almighty respectable as ye say, why don't she treat True Tisdale like a respectable married woman would, hey?"

Captain Caleb advanced a step toward the little gossip. Unconsciously his great arms flexed, a movement that was not unnoticed by the other who flinched back. It was the second time within a few days that Captain Caleb had heard the same insinuation. He answered it as he had before.

"Who says she don't, hey?" he demanded. "By godfrey, ye're in shallow water agin, Oz. Git out inter the channel."

But for all his fear, Hemingway was not to be entirely silenced by a threat. He had not shot his last round in a battle that was to him pleasing, but was so unworthy, since his verbal ammunition was sent forth with but one idea in view—that of besmirching a woman's name, of insinuating that an innocent girl was not all she should be, and for no other reason than that Ozra Hemingway had aligned himself on the side of scandal-loving women of his community, who disliked Trueman Tisdale's wife, because she was pretty and had won the big lightship captain's love, which they believed should have gone to some other of their own choosing. Once more he thrust forth his wizened face.

"Wal, now, there's Nate Sanderson come back,

didn't he? Don't ev'rybuddy know how she carried on with Nate, and now first thing off here she is walkin' with him, hey? Ye don't jest 'xactly 'spect a married woman ter—"

Captain Caleb turned on his heel and reached down to pick up the seaman's cap he still affected, despite the years that had passed since he had been in the active service of the sea that was once his life.

"I don't 'spect nuthin'!" he snapped. "That's why I hain't ever gittin' dis'pointed! Comin,' Cap'n Hen?" he added to his old confrère. "Got ter git out on th' hurricane deck, got ter git my brain blowed free of fool idees."

Ozra Hemingway twisted his face into a grin of delight, as the two doughty old captains left the room and banged the door shut behind them. He nodded decisively.

"Think yer smart, don't ye?" he muttered after the retreating figures. "Wal, we'll see what we'll see! Nate Sanderson's back."

Dorothy Merrill kicked at the pebbles on the beach near the Tisdale home with her white-shod foot. Beside her stood Martha Tisdale, gazing out to sea. Dorothy most evidently had something on her mind, but she hesitated to say it. At last she looked up at her companion.

"Is—is Captain Tisdale coming home to stay long this time?" she queried.

Martha Tisdale answered with a smile that was touched with sadness, as she shook her head.

"'Fraid not, Dorothy," was her reply, as she shaded her eyes with a hand that showed brown beside the daintier white one of the city girl. "Oh, I do wish he would, though," she added plaintively, "I—I miss him so, and . . ."

Her eyes turned from the sea to wander along the river road where could be seen the retreating figure of a nattily dressed man—Nate Sanderson. Her companion did not fail to see the glance. Her eyes clouded, as she tossed her head in the direction of the man in the distance.

"I don't like him," she observed bluntly. "I wish he would go away."

"Why—why," Martha looked her surprise. "Why, I thought he was awfully nice to you—to us," was her comment.

"Too nice—by far." The words were bitten off. "I've seen his kind before—" Impulsively she slipped an arm about the waist of Trueman Tisdale's wife. "Oh, Martha, dear," she cried. "I watched him—looking at you—I didn't like it—please say you won't let him fool you. Won't you take my word for it? I've seen more men than you have, even if we are the same age, and—and I don't like him."

The young wife's eyes widened for a moment, then her lids were lowered to hide the depth of feeling with which they were filled.

"I love my husband, Dorothy," she said simply and with a conclusiveness.

CHAPTER VII

AS if the arrival of Nate Sanderson had been a pre-arranged signal, tongues that had for a time been stilled began again to wag to Martha-ward. From some vague whisperings that could be picked up around the post office, it would even be imagined that it had partly been the young wife's conniving that had brought back to the little village a man who had been her avowed admirer. In no sense of the word could Nate Sanderson ever have been considered Martha Rogers' suitor, for in the first place Nate was not a marrying man—he boasted as much. And in the second place, as Mehitable Sands put it, "What in time would a fine, upstanding young feller like Nate Sanderson want marryin' the daughter of that no-account Rogers, her that had never lived any place but in that filthy shack down by the water front, and spent her time perking up to catch the eye of every chap in town?"

Nevertheless, the returned wanderer had, in the days before Martha turned all her attention to Trueman Tisdale, been much in her society, and it could not but be said, truthfully, that Martha had not relished his attentions. Martha's life for a long time had been principally made up of flattery from the

youth of the village, and she had responded to it as a sunflower to the golden orb of day.

In spite of prophecies to the contrary, though, Martha Tisdale had been a good wife to Trueman, and even the most carping had found nothing to complain of in her conduct, except a sage wagging of heads, and an admonition "to wait." Now it seemed that the waiting had not been in vain. Nate Sanderson had returned and it was plain to the eye that not the least of the attractions his former home town held for him were the sparkling eyes of another man's wife. Not that Nate cared one whit whether a woman were married or not, if she pleased his fancy. He was not that kind, either.

When Nate Sanderson had become the first officer of a coastwise packet that made regular trips out of Boston, he had kept pretty well away from Bayport, the pleasures of the New England metropolis being far more to his liking. Outwardly, Nate Sanderson was all that a young man should be, unless one took time to look deep into his snapping black eyes which held an insincerity and cunning that could not well be concealed. Dapper, well set-up, dressed as one of the handsome youths who look out from the clothing advertisements in magazines, he was a figure to catch the eye, to say nothing of the feminine heart.

In fact, Nate Sanderson was a favorite with most of the women of Bayport, including even those of the Neptune Club Auxiliary, and there were few who would have altogether scorned the easy flattery which dripped from his ready tongue like honey.

With feminine Bayport, the young first officer passed quite as the blasé man of the world, and as such, of course, he was admired.

Of course, too, his attentions to women were lavish, and there would not have been one of them who would not have resented the simple truth about Nate Sanderson should it have been told them. For Nate Sanderson was that blotch on civilization—a man who thinks women his legitimate prey. In his code, it was his right to have any woman for his own—if he could get her. The man was an out and out rotter, a type that simple men instinctively distrusted as simple women believed.

Such, then, was the man who had come back to Bayport to find Martha Rogers the wife of another man, her beauty so enhanced by the love she gave her silent, undemonstrative husband that her desirability was triply enhanced. It was with an inward wise smile that he realized that the stage had been well set for him, too, since he soon came to know that Martha Tisdale had been elevated by the tongue of gossip to a personage of a sort. Nate Sanderson would not have been himself had he not taken advantage of this gossip to further his own ends.

At first Martha Tisdale believed it mere accident when she ran across the man so often, in the streets, in the store and post office, even down her own river road as she would be coming home from the town. Then she came to know that it was not coincidence, but a deliberate planning. The girl resented it, but neither would she have been Martha Tisdale, who

was Rogers, had she not felt just the little bit of elation in the fact that the man whom all feminine Bayport admired was obviously finding opportunities to be near her, and did not veil his admiration for herself.

Many times she thought to tell Trueman, to plead with him to stay ashore—more in order to protect her against the gossip of which none than she knew better—but always she hesitated. Suppose Trueman should not understand? Suppose, too, he should think she was encouraging Nate Sanderson. Martha Tisdale felt her own position in her husband's heart too insecure to risk it. And the gossip went on.

Captain Caleb Fish came swinging up from the harbor front lugging one of his eternal lobster pots, still dripping from its latest immersion. He turned a speculative eye on one of its lathes that had broken loose. "Dern them fighting lobsters, and that ripping tide of the Gut," he pondered. "Making a man forever mending something when he had ought to be taking his ease, now that he is ashore for keeps and the most substantial man in the community." A voice from across the street hailed him.

"Whar ye bound?" demanded Cap'n Hen, as he waddled across to his friend, narrowly escaping the little nip which old Battler Perkins' white horse, Charley, playfully gave in his direction, as he passed ahead of the animal. Perkins pulled rein.

"Whar ye bound yerself?" the expressman asked acidly. "Want the hull road?" But the acidity in the voice changed to a chuckle as he brought his

rickety wagon to a stop, leaned down toward the ruddy old seaman and offered, in a stage whisper that could be heard half way up the street: "Ef ye take my advice, Cap'n, ye'll hunt a harbor quick. Jest see Mehit' Sands headin' this way, and she looked mighty determined—" The chuckle expanded into a roar of laughter as he clucked to his old horse. Captain Hen's face was a study in crimson, as he tugged frantically at his whiskers.

"Now ye just quit that joshin', Perkins," he demanded, but there was a look of near panic on his moon-like face. "Want th' whole dinged town gabbin'? All the blamed gossipin' in this town makes me sick anyway—" His remark was finished to his old friend, Captain Caleb, as Perkins slapped the reins over the back of his old horse and ambled up the street. "Gossip! That's all they do—even got it right in the Neptune Club, too, now, ever since we had to let the wimmin in. Humph!"

Captain Hen seemed about to say more anent his own troubles, but there came a change in his voice as he turned and glanced down the street. Concern was written on his cheery features. He was seeing something the looks of which he did not like. "Lookee there, now," and his gnarled finger pointed, "there'll be some more of hit right off. See them two chinnin' on the corner? Don't seem to worry 'em none, either."

Captain Caleb gave a half sigh as he, too, glanced up the street to see Martha Tisdale and Nate

Sanderson standing there, for all the eyes of the village to behold, in earnest conversation.

"That now, that's what comes of gossip!" Captain Hen's voice held bitterness as he went on. " 'Spose she'd be havin' anything to do with that feller ef she hadn't been ragged into ribbons by a lot of cacklin' hens—she's and he's—ontil she don't give a durn? Wish't people'd mind their own durned business!"

It was too much for Captain Caleb. For once he had no reply, and it was while he was pondering that another offered what was in his mind for him. Sidling up the street with the shuffle that had become as familiar in the town as was his personality and quaint religious philosophy, came Shiner, the old darky fish peddler of whom Martha Tisdale had spoken to Dorothy as one person in town who would give her a good name.

At first the black man did not see Captain Hen and Captain Caleb. His eyes, too, were focused on the pair on the street corner who were apparently so interested in each other. He plumped straight into them before he saw them and it was with profuse apologies that he backed away from Captain Caleb's lobster pot which stood up-ended beside its owner. But Shiner knew he was privileged. He knew he could speak his mind. And he spoke it without the usual profuse apologies to the town's big man which would have been given under ordinary circumstances.

"Cap'n Hen," he inquired coming nearer, the whites of his eyes rolling in the direction of the dis-

cussed pair, "How come don't nobuddy quote Scripture to dat pore chile—'Deliver thee from the way of the evil man'?"

For a moment Captain Hen rubbed his chin in silent contemplation of the matter. Then he beamed broadly at the old negro as the answer came to him: "Dinged ef I know, Shiner—onless it's because we're too durned apt to heed another proverb, 'Who keepeth his mouth and tongue keepeth his soul from trouble.' Guess most of us think too much of our own comfort, eh, Shiner?"

Muttering to himself as his woolly head bobbed, the old fish peddler made his way up the street. But the reproachful look which he cast at Martha Tisdale, flushed and pretty as the rose colored thin gown she wore, was unheeded. She was listening intently to what it was her companion was saying.

"Oh, if I could only believe it were true!" Old Shiner had caught the tremor in Martha's voice as he scuttled past. Again his kinky head wagged sorrowfully. But how was Shiner, whose everyday business took him where he heard only the worst possible constructions put on any conduct of Martha Tisdale's, to know of what she was talking—how innocent was her remark? Nate Sanderson's whispered reply was too low for him to hear, but he could not help seeing the manner in which the first officer bent over the woman to whom he was talking as he answered her.

"I tell you it is true," Nate whispered, "my infor-

mation comes straight, and if you really want to know about your father—"

"More than anything in the world!" The girl's voice broke in passionately. "Oh, if he is alive! You know, they didn't think much of him around here, but I—I loved him—he was always so good to me—a lot better than most of the people in Bayport, I can say—" she ended bitterly, as her own glance wandered up the street to the gate of Mehitable Sands where that spinster had come out bareheaded for a word with a passing neighbor. Miss Sands could not let such an opportunity as this pass; she could not wait to discuss Martha and Nate until time for the mail to come in.

"Then you'll come?" There was eagerness in his urging.

Nate Sanderson's eyes narrowed to hide the gleam of triumph. He was playing an old, old game—the game of the hunter and the hunted, and he was finding joy in the pursuit. As usual, too, the odds were in favor of the hunter. After all, Martha Tisdale was a plastic and unformed personality, and in spite of herself she was finding a certain enjoyment in the admiration of the sophisticated man who was so openly her admirer. To do her justice, though, there was no thought of wrong in her mind; she was like a purring kitten that likes its fur stroked, and responded in much the same way.

Perhaps had Martha Tisdale had more of that stroking from her own husband, she might have kept farther away from Nate Sanderson for all of his

persistence. But there were two elements at work. Trueman Tisdale, for all of his love for his wife, was undemonstrative. There was no way in which she could look into his heart and see the near idolatry with which he considered her. His devotion to his duty to the lightship kept him away from her so much, that she was almost persuaded that some of the things the women of Bayport were so ready to say were true—that he had married her because he pitied her.

Fisherman's daughter though she was, Martha Tisdale did not want to be pitied. She wanted love; admiration; no more than the meed of any young woman with her ability to return it. Then there were the women of Bayport. Martha knew how innocent had been her every move; how her whole life had been wrapped up in her husband since she had married him; she bitterly resented the injustice of those accusers who insinuated otherwise. In a resentful mood, she had more than once thought of flinging discretion to the winds—to do some thing to give them to talk about, as she told herself, but always the thought of Trueman and how she cared for him, had obtruded.

It was when in these reckless moods that she would stop and talk to Sanderson when he forced the opportunity, and there was something of unholy glee in which she would watch the gossips busily flitting up the streets to spread the newest word about what Martha Tisdale and that Nate Sanderson were doing. Always, too, she had been able to stop

his advances beyond a certain point, but perhaps not with all the determination she should have shown under more sympathetic circumstances. It was this very indecision, though, that encouraged the woman hunter to go on in his pursuit, to push every advantage.

In spite of everything, the first officer who believed himself so irresistible, had not been able to obtain a rendezvous with the wife of the lightship captain. These meetings on streets and public places might be all right in their way—certainly they encouraged the gossip which no one enjoyed more than he who believed himself such a devil of a fellow—but they were not enough. He could not unloose the full battery of his charms and persuasion unless he could get her alone. It was with this purpose in view that he had stopped Martha Tisdale this morning, and tried another tack.

He noticed the indecision with which she shook her head at his urging.

"If you have anything to tell me about my father—if you really have any reason to believe he is alive," she begged, "won't you tell me right here—now? Please!"

But he shook his head.

"It's such a long story," he told her, "there's so much to explain—the public street is not exactly the proper place for such confidences. Now, you do as I say—you just slip up the Back Road, near the cemetery, and I'll stroll on down the street and then

meet you back up there in about an hour. What say, eh? You want to hear about your father?"

Slowly the girl's head nodded. Most earnestly she did want to hear about her father; to know that there was a chance of hearing from him again, though he had left her all alone to bear the shafts of criticism which for so long had been her portion in Bayport, she would give much once more to feel his arms about her, and his bluff laughter as he "jollied" the neighbors who thought they were so "high and mighty."

Full well she knew she ought not to listen to Sanderson's suggestion; there was that in his eyes that told her he was not making the sort of proposition a decent man might make who possessed information of so vital a nature to her. But it had caught her in a reckless mood—it was a mood that had been with her since the morning when she had been especially piqued at what she considered her husband's indifference, and rebellious over unearned criticism.

With the air of one taking a plunge into cold water, she straightened her slim body as she faced Nate Sanderson.

"All right," she said simply, "I'll be there."

Without another word she turned and half stumbled up the street, past Captain Caleb with his lobster pot and Captain Hen, with unseeing eyes. She was rehearsing the scene of the morning in her home, and the bitterness of it was turning all the glorious day into pain and turmoil.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTAIN HEN squinted after Martha Tisdale as she hurried by.

"Humph!" he commented, as he noted the way she held her head so high that not a flower on her small chip bonnet bobbled. "Wind's up an' down the mast thar, right enough."

"More'n like Ma Tisdale's been whistlin' up the mast out Tisdale's way," nodded Captain Caleb. " 'Low she's 'nough to start any 'Irish hurricane'."

But Martha heard them no more than she saw them. Probably a smile might have flitted across her set features if she had, for this daughter of the sea knew well the sailor man's jargon, however unintelligible it might have been to the layman. A fair wind and a good sailing breeze is his delight; no greater calamity can there be for him than the dead calm that lets his pennant hang limp and sad from his peak. It would be hard to try to trace this sea superstition any more than a thousand others—the sailorman's lore is a lexicon in itself—but this Martha would have recalled had she not been so intent on her own affairs that she did not heed her two kindly old friends who watched her with eyes of sympathy. She knew, too, that when the pennant is laying alongside the mast, they will tell one the "wind is

up and down the mast," and it is then when the calamity dead calm comes that they "whistle up the mast" for a breeze.

Martha was unheeding because she was rehearsing the scene of the morning in her home, and the bitterness of it was turning all the day and the pleasure she had had in Trueman's visit into wormwood.

It had been a surprise, but a great happiness the night before when Trueman had suddenly appeared out of the shadows behind them on the beach while she and Dorothy Merrill were sitting there watching the lights out on the bay, and Dorothy was telling her tales of the dances and other frivolities she knew and of which Martha had had little chance to know—reminiscences brought up as they watched the big hotel on the Point across from them burst into an unwonted brilliance, since it was one of those nights when a big ball was to be given.

For a long time they had sat here, the three of them, and it seemed to Martha that at last she was getting more happiness than she had craved, for Trueman had been, for him, in a jovial mood, and had entertained the two girls with sea tales and some of the quaintly humorous or philosophical ideas which he acquired out there in his loneliness as he watched the sea from his lightship. It had been late when they had come down the river road after taking Dorothy home—so late that Ma Tisdale had gone to bed—something for which Martha was deeply grateful, for, for once, she had her husband to herself.

Trueman had not aroused her when he had come down stairs for his breakfast, and she had waked with a start to find him gone, and had rushed into her clothing that she might miss no minute of his rare visit. There had been a snatch of one of Dorothy's songs on her lips as she ran down the steps. The kitchen door was open and no one about. But when she stopped in the open door, the song died. Outside, Trueman was hoeing one of his rows of prize corn. Beside him stood Ma Tisdale, and it was the whine of her voice that Martha heard.

"When'll ye quit bein' a fool, True Tisdale, and come to yer right senses?" she was asking. "I tell ye the critter is the talk of the town, her and that Nate Sanderson, all along of ye bein' as blind as a bat! Ye can't make a silk glove outer a pig's ear, and a beach-whacker's daughter—"

Her heart in her mouth, Martha listened. So Ma Tisdale was taking the first opportunity of telling Trueman what the nasty gossipers were trying to do with her reputation. How would he take it? She stepped inside the door for a hiding place. Unaccountably her heart was beating with a sort of elation. If Trueman got mad—said things, even did things—no matter whether to her or to Sanderson—then perhaps he did care after all.

Deliberately Trueman Tisdale laid aside his hoe and wiped his hands. He squinted up at the sky.

"Humph!" he commented. "Looks like we might be goin' to have a bender of some kind. 'Red sky in the mornin', sailors take warnin'; red sky at

night, sailors' delight.' 'Low I'd best be getting along back to the lightship."

"Ye're an idiot, True Tisdale!" Ma's voice was a screech of wrath. "Hain't I gone and done my duty by tellin' ye and here ye be talkin' about the weather. My land, but men are fools—all of them."

"Got anything to eat?" asked Trueman, as he turned to the kitchen door.

But Martha was not there. She had fled. A forlorn little heap, she lay in the darkened sitting room with her face buried in her arms, as she sobbed out her grief on the slippery hair cloth of an old sofa.

"Oh, he don't care!" she moaned. "He isn't even interested! Oh, True! True!"

Could she have seen inside her husband's heart, though, as he ate his morning meal, fondly believing her to be sleeping, her pain would have changed to gladness. For Trueman Tisdale had not been interested in his step-mother's gossip for the simple reason that his love for his wife was so strong and fine, his own ideas of good so big, that it had not entered his head that Martha could be guilty of even suspicion. To Trueman Tisdale marriage was an utterly binding contract. In his simple faith, he could not imagine that it should be otherwise regarded by the woman he had married. He would not wound her by even referring to the nasty comments that had fallen from Ma Tisdale's tongue,—a tongue whose shrewishness he had had cause to know for many a year.

Martha Tisdale's rapid walking had brought her

up the Back Road to the cemetery rendezvous before she had finished the scene which had gone through and through her soul for the hours succeeding Trueman's leaving for the lightship. With a sinking at her heart, she remembered that he had not even gone up stairs to kiss her good-bye, but she did not attribute it to the real reason—that Trueman had not wanted to disturb her after she had been up with him so late the night before. No, she had reached one conclusion. Trueman did not care for her. It didn't much matter what she did.

She knew well enough that she should not be keeping this appointment with Sanderson, but in her reckless mood, nothing seemed to matter. Of course she wanted to know about her father, but this bait of Sanderson's would not have been sufficient had not other causes plead the man's own. She would have insisted that, if he had news, he should tell it to her in the presence of her husband.

She sat down on a bed of ivy inside the stone fence to wait for him. Nor was he long in appearing. He walked up briskly, though with furtive glances about him, and flung himself down beside the girl on the ivy—too close beside her. Instinctively she moved away. Sanderson's laugh was insinuating.

"Not afraid of me, are you?" he bantered. "You're safely married, aren't you?"

"What is it you know about my father, Nate Sanderson?" she demanded.

"I know his daughter is about the sweetest thing my eyes ever rested on, and—"

"Did you bring me up here to tell me that?"

Martha leaped to her feet, and took a backward step toward the break in the stone wall. But she was not quick enough. Nate Sanderson was beside her, and his arms went about her in a passionate hold. He pulled her head down against his chest, laughing at the struggles she gave.

"Not that, exactly," he whispered hotly. "But this—and this—and this—" Maddened kisses rained on the face she tried to pull away. He was half choking her, and her struggles only made it worse. She tried to scream, but only gurgles of distress came. She heard his whispered words.

"—And to tell you that I love you—love you! That you're mine—and I mean to have you!"

Blindly the girl struck out, but her only reward was to be held tighter in the arms that she tried to spurn.

"Don't be a little fool!" Nate Sanderson's grip tightened like a gorilla's—not for nothing was he the mate of a steamer and led an outdoor life—and she gave a little moan of pain as he pulled her hand away from his face—the hand with which she was trying to scratch him, woman-fashion, in an unequal battle. She stumbled and fell directly on his chest.

A slight crackle of the berry bushes beyond the wall, and gasps like gusty wind brought Nate Sanderson upstanding. He turned fiercely toward the sound. All but exhausted, Martha fell away from him. Titters of amusement, cackles of outraged sanctity, drew her attention to the break in the wall,

just in time to see Mehitable Sands stalk through it, unmindful of the briars which impeded her progress. Her lean face was like a thunder cloud as she leveled a thin, scrawny finger at her victims. With her other hand, she motioned backward toward someone in the bushes, though Martha could see the wide eyes of the three girls who hid there. Mehitable's basket of berries—the seeking of which had brought her to this spot at what she would have called the psychological moment, fell to the ground unheeded as she emphasized her point.

"So this is what the God-fearin' must put up with right in the sight of the innocent?" she demanded. Martha stumbled forward a step, but she did not fail to see the grim delight in her enemy's eyes as that scrawny finger condemned her.

"I 'low, young lady," she said in accents of scorn, "I 'low that this will jest about settle you around these parts."

With a little murmur of despair, Martha Tisdale covered her face with her hands and fled headlong down the Back Road. She could not have told where she was going. She did not especially care.

Nate Sanderson stepped forward with a gesture of gallantry and retrieved the Sands woman's berry basket. With a graceful bow he handed it to her.

"I am afraid you've lost some of your berries, Miss Mehitable," he said, with a grin, "but I guess you'll be wanting to hurry on to the post office or the Auxiliary now, won't you? You've some real scandal!"

CHAPTER IX

HOW often it is reiterated that, in the matter of the eternal triangle, it is the injured third party who is the last to realize what is happening. Tongues may wag, eyes turn aslant, as those who are gossiped about go on their way, in any small town such as Bayport—for "Main Street" is Main Street the world over. Rather it is, according to the rule, the one most vitally concerned who is the very last to learn of the perfidy of sweetheart or friend, of wife or husband.

Friends may be friends, but they are all too inclined, as Captain Hen Berry told the negro, Shiner, to heed the proverb about a still tongue—and keep out of trouble themselves—however much a dropped word might clear the atmosphere.

Ma Tisdale, however, could be trusted to see to it that she was the exception. Her animosity toward her step-daughter-in-law, and her natural love of hearing her own vituperative tongue, were too strongly developed for her to leave Trueman in placid ignorance of what the rest of their world were saying about his wife and Nate Sanderson. It was too much to expect that she would delay the telling.

Naturally it had been to Ma Tisdale that

Mehitable Sands had hurried first with her tale about seeing Martha in Sanderson's arms.

Martha had been certain of the procedure. When she had run from Nate and the taunting of Mehitable Sands, she had not stopped in her mad rush until she had reached the sanctuary of her own room, her little white-curtained room that looked out over the water, through the windows of which she could see the flickering lights of her husband's lightship night after night as she lay thinking of him, wondering if he were giving her a thought in her loneliness.

With her hands clasped tightly about her knees, she sat there in awed silence. Not a moan escaped her, but her brain was working with feverish thoughts. What would the townspeople do to her now? What would Trueman think? For she knew without being told that Ma Tisdale would tell him the sordid details, with all the embroidery of which her venomous imagination was capable. Could she make Trueman believe her in the face of such evidence as Mehitable Sands could produce?

In her tortured brain she could hear the rattle of the tittle-tattlers of the town, a veritable plague of them. She could hear the tongues of the Auxiliary rolling this choicest new tidbit around and under them. She knew how the story would grow and grow with each repetition, as the bearers of the news flew from the post office, from picket gate to picket gate along the winding streets. She could hear the whisperings. She knew the imaginations of her townswomen—knew, too, how they had been waiting

for just such an opportunity to scourge her who had done nothing to them save to be born of a parent whom they held in contempt, to wed a man whom they had one and all held too good for her.

It was long past the noon hour that day when Trueman Tisdale's dory again scraped on the beach. and Trueman, freshly washed and shaved as befitted a homecomer—tanned and wholesome from his long hours of communion with wind and wave and sun —hurried up the pebbled path that led to his home. An expression of hurt surprise crossed his face for a moment as he noted that Martha was not on the little porch to greet him. He had pictured her running along the path to welcome him home.

Inside there was an unaccustomed silence. Not even the sing-song wail of Sue Gilpin, the lanky orphan whom Ma Tisdale had taken in a few years ago to help with the work, could be heard. There must be something wrong when Sue was not nasally proclaiming something about "At the Cross, at the Cross where I fi-i-r-s-t saw th' light," or the like.

Trueman pushed open the kitchen door. In a low rocker drawn up close to the red cloth-covered table, Ma Tisdale was vigorously rocking herself. The thin line of her mouth proclaimed that there was something she was thinking of—hard—something which she must get off her mind unless an explosion were imminent. Trueman Tisdale knew the signs, but in his usual quiet way which so many took for blindness when it was something far deeper, he ignored the storm signals Ma Tisdale flew.

He cleared his throat.

"Where's Martha?" he asked casually.

Ma's snort of indignation set awry the square-framed glasses that adorned her long nose.

"Humph!" she ejaculated. "I'd say hit was 'bout time ye asked where she be, True Tisdale. Humph!" her lips snapped shut. "Gallivantin', I 'low—" They snapped shut again. "With that Nate Sanderson—"

The venomous sparkle in Ma Tisdale's eyes—the unfriendly sparkle behind the square-framed glasses plainly showed that she was expecting her earned excitement now that her bomb was sprung. But if she had expected to rouse the silent keeper of the lightship, she was disappointed. Neither by sign or word did Trueman appear to have heard anything out of the way. His eyes roved over to the shining stove on which a tea kettle was sizzling, and his nostrils distended naturally as he went over and lifted the lid of a pot which Sue Gilpin banged on the back of the stove.

"Got anything to eat?" he inquired nonchalantly. "I'm hungry. Don't understand why the lightship cook can't seem to make anything—"

Ma Tisdale stopped short in her rocking and sat up with a jerk.

"True Tisdale!" Her voice was a shriek. "Hain't ye never goin' to git no sense? Here I'm doin' my duty and tellin' you about that—that—hus—" Something in the depths of the eyes with which

Trueman Tisdale turned on her stopped her short in the epithet!

"'Bout that—that critter ye've married," she amended, "and all you do is ask 'bout something to eat. Mightn't be so hongry effen I was to tell ye she was seen by half the town in the arms of that Nate Sanderson. Now, what ye got to say?"

For all the emotion he displayed, Trueman Tisdale might have been listening to his step-mother relating how the black tabby cat had just brought her new batch of kittens down out of the attic. He strolled over to the window overlooking the garden, which was beginning to have the full flush of its maturity, and stared out. Under his breath he was humming a tune, but what that tune was, Trueman Tisdale could not have told you. For deep down under the repression of his nature—the repression that so many years of self-communion and living with the great things of nature had fostered—he was hurt, deeply hurt. Not so much for himself, as for Martha.

Not that for a moment he doubted Martha, either. The man was too much of an idealist for that, and even now it did not occur to him to believe for a moment anything that Ma Tisdale was saying. What he was thinking was, how hard it must be for Martha to be the victim of that scurrilous tongue while he was away on duty. He was wondering, for about the thousandth time, if there was not some way in which he could get rid of the woman his father had married. Not for his own

sake, but for Martha's. As he unseeingly watched the green of his favorite Swiss chard in the sun, he did not even hear Ma as she hurried on with her tirade.

But if Trueman did not, another did, and it was a frightened young woman who pressed herself up against the inside of the kitchen doorway as she heard herself condemned. Martha Tisdale had heard the sound of voices below as she sat in her bedroom and had brought herself to come down to face the worst. She could not imagine what Trueman would do when Ma told him. Even with the courage of innocence, she had not been able to enter the kitchen when she heard her step-mother, and now she stood with a hand pressed against a beating heart as she waited. But Trueman did not speak. Only Ma went on, bitterly wailing:

"And ye can stand there, True Tisdale," she moaned, "jest starin' out at nuthin', jest a sayin' nuthin', and not thinkin' of me none, and what a terrible blow hit is to me to have my poor dead husband's home deserkrated by sech a scandal, and the hull town knowin' hit, and you, ye jest actin' like a stun image, and what kin I do?"

Ma Tisdale paused for breath, "Jest as I told Mehitable Sands when she come and told me not an hour ago, when she had already told most ev'rybuddy in town, and—"

Trueman turned from the window and there was an unusual scowl on his strong young face.

"Hasn't Mehitable Sands anything to do at home

that she must spend her time running about with wild gossip?" he asked sternly.

But Ma did not heed. She hurried on.

"An' she says to me, 'No, Ma Tisdale, I can't sit down, I must hurry home, but who am I to be 'tendin' to my own self or Jonas till I'd warned ye and the rest of the town, though heavens knows I don't expect no thanks from True, for a man that will let a critter wind him 'round her fingers till he's clean looney—' And I says to her, 'Mehitable,' says I, 'what can I do with a man what ain't got no proper feelin', and heavens know, too, his poor dead father wouldn't have acted like he does when I try to tell him things for his own good,' and hit's true, True Tisdale, true as Gospel, and you know your poor dead father wouldn't have acted like you're doin,' askin' for something to eat, had anyone told him I'd gone gallavantin' with fancy men on dark roads—"

For sheer lack of breath Ma Tisdale stopped for a moment. Across Trueman's face swept the understanding glance of humor, all too rare, that showed to those who knew him well how human he was, deep down, under his silent exterior.

"Are you sure, Ma," he asked quizzically, "are you sure it wasn't worry over that that killed him?"

As though she had been waiting for just this expression of something human from her husband, Martha Tisdale came hesitatingly into the room. Angrily, Ma Tisdale rose from her chair, and there was a depth of meaningful scorn in the movement

with which she pulled aside her skirts as she swept the frightened and protesting Sue Gilpin through the outside kitchen door. She pointed an accusing finger at Martha, who timidly approached her husband.

"There she be, now!" she screamed. "You ask her, herself, True—see if she can deny hit. Warn't ye up on the Back Road with Nate Sanderson, warn't ye?"

Sick at heart and frightened, Martha looked from one to the other. Only a movement on the part of her husband would have caused her to seek the protecting shelter of his arms. But in his face she saw nothing. As usual, the depths of Trueman Tisdale's feelings were hidden behind the mask he wore before the world. But, oh, if she could have known the tenderness, the yearning in his heart!

Could she have read that his silence was but a recognition of the preposterousness of the charge against the woman he loved—the woman he trusted, since to him love, trust, and the covenant of marriage were one and the same. But she did not. She drew back, her face paling, her mind confusedly hunting for words.

Martha Tisdale was not a dissembler; she had not the poise of the woman of the world to come to her aid in an emergency. She verily believed that if she told the truth about her rendezvous on the Back Road that she would not be believed. She must not further estrange the man she loved at any cost. And so she told a lie—a white lie.

"I—I was up there after candleberries, True,"

she stammered, "and Nate, he came along about the time Mehitable Sands did, and—"

Ma Tisdale let forth a peal of raucous laughter, as she switched her skirts to the farthest point away from the embarrassed young wife.

"Candleberries!" she jeered. "With a million bushels of 'em growin' forty rods behind your own back door. Likely story! Paugh!"

The silence of husband and wife was Ma Tisdale's opportunity. Perhaps she believed that she had at last partly succeeded in breaking down her step-son's faith in his wife. Perhaps she had only wound herself up to a point where she could not stop. However, it was a sad five minutes that followed, in which she poured forth her torrent of complaint, allegation and opinion of Martha. Perhaps, too, she would not have found such joy in the vituperation had she known that it was the girl alone who was hearing her, each word searing deeply into wounds already aching—each sentence rousing higher resentment that bade fair to burst all bonds, and give Ma Tisdale and all Bayport something real to talk about.

Timorously Martha watched Trueman's face. But, as usual, it told her nothing. That far-away look in his eyes could mean but one thing. Trueman did not care. He heard what Ma Tisdale was saying—knew what all Bayport was saying—and he did not mean to do anything about it. He did not care! It was too much. With a rush the tears came—bitter, angry tears. And without looking at

him—she did not see the look of understanding he cast on her—she fled through the outer kitchen door, around the front of the house, and to the knoll overlooking the sea. Deep pity was in the look that Trueman Tisdale gave her as he watched her flying figure out of sight.

Ma Tisdale would not have been so happy had she known that her words had fallen on unhearing ears, as far as Trueman was concerned. Without a glance in her direction, he, too, turned out of the kitchen door. One glimpse he caught of the disappearing figure.

"Poor little child!" he thought. "It's too bad! We'll have to get rid of the old woman—some way—"

An hour later Martha had not returned, but it did not occur to Trueman to go searching for her. If he had he would have found her, a pitiful little heap, under a scraggly cedar, whose thin branches hung out over the cliff. She sobbed out her hurts to the waters of the ocean that surged thirty feet below. Staunch as he was, it had not even occurred to him that Martha should doubt his steadfastness. He came into the kitchen bearing a handful of Swiss chard. He dropped it on the table beside Sue Gilpin, who was busy over her bread making.

"Tell Martha I had to be getting back to the lightship," he said, "tell her I left this for her, and to eat some for me, and," and he leaned over to whisper cautiously with one eye cocked toward the

doorway leading from the kitchen, "tell her not to be mindin' Ma too much."

Sue Gilpin grinned and scratched the back of one leg with the toe of her worn shoe. She understood. She nodded assent, and a realization of the need of caution. And, perhaps if Sue Gilpin had not forgotten Trueman's message almost as soon as it had been given, Martha Tisdale would not have undergone all the bitterness of the night that followed, would not have made the resolves that were to have such bitter consequences.

Crunching feet in the sand behind him stopped Trueman Tisdale, as, with head hung low and still considering the matter of getting rid of the stepmother who was making of his young wife's life a misery, he had almost reached his beached dory. At the sound he turned quickly, and his slow smile of recognition welcomed the short stubby figure of Captain Hen Berry as he puffed his way toward him. Captain Hen greeted him with a long hail.

"Halloo, there, True, didn't know ye was 'shore."

"Yes—had a couple of hours—thought I'd take a look at my garden."

Despite his known liking for the old seaman, and Captain Hen's apparent eagerness for a chat, it was evident from Trueman Tisdale's manner, that he was not as willing as usual to be stopped now that he had started for his lightship. He took another step toward the dory, but Captain Hen fell in beside him.

"How's everything 'board ship, True?" he asked,

as though he were asking for news of a vessel he had not heard of in many a day.

"Shipshape." Trueman Tisdale wasted no words. He moved forward.

"So!" said Captain Hen Berry. Then he squinted up at the long, tall sailorman beside him. "An' lonely?" he asked.

Trueman shook his head. "Not special," he admitted, with a shrug. "Plenty to think about out there—and I'm used to it. Guess it's born in the Tisdale blood, attending lightship. Three generations have done it."

For a moment the round little captain did not speak. He seemed to be thinking something over, but was as loath to speak as he was to allow Trueman to enter the dory in which he was without doubt so anxious to put out, being deterred only, it was apparent, by the politeness that would not let him leave the garrulous old captain so abruptly.

"So!" he repeated. "Three generations—seems likely hit's time fer a change? Two weeks on board and one ashore—seems like that might make a difference to a family man."

The big lightship captain wheeled to face his tubby companion. "Captain Hen," he asked abruptly, "have you been listening to gossip?"

Uneasy, uncertain what to say, the ruddy face of Captain Hen grew ruddier in the sunset glow or with embarrassment as he merely nodded, his right hand tugging at his whiskers.

"Have you?" Trueman was insistent.

"Wal, I—I hear things," was the reluctant admission.

"So do I." Trueman's jaw closed with a snap. "But hearing things never hurt anyone. You don't have to listen to them."

A broad grin crossed the face of Captain Hen Berry.

"I 'low ye hain't been much to the club since the wimmin got the upper hand, have ye, True?" he asked. "Why, Lord, man, ye've got to listen. Say, lookee here, True," and his tone changed from a laughing one to serious earnest. "I know hit hain't none of my gol-durned business, but—but see here," he blurted it out, "you know I'm gosh-amighty fond of Martha, don't ye?"

A slow smile came to Trueman Tisdale's face.

"Yes," he admitted. "So am I."

"Her never havin' had a mother," went on Captain Hen, "and not gittin' much help from the kind of father luck give her, why, I've jest kinder kept a weather eye on her, so to speak, and—"

"All right! quit tacking, Cap'n Hen." Trueman spoke tersely. "What's on your mind?"

Captain Hen, so admonished, made short work of what he had hitherto tried so unsuccessfully to say.

"Did hit never occur to ye," he blurted out, "that ye're makin' livin' mighty hard for her, leavin' her here alone in the village with all these here talkin' females—leavin' her to fight out her own battles?"

Trueman Tisdale's long hand reached out and

was laid gently on the shoulder of his friend. In his eyes was signaled the depth of feeling that few saw, but which none, seeing, ever forgot, or who after seeing could ever hold Trueman Tisdale to be a callous man.

"Cap'n Hen," he said slowly, "I married Martha against the advice of most every one because I loved her, and I felt certain she loved me. A man—one like me, anyway, trusts the woman he loves. That's all there is to it, you see. And I haven't had any reason not to trust her—yet. To-day for the first time I realized they were talking. It has never bothered me. I know this town, and I know something of the world, and it seems to me that it is the way of the world to throw acid around, just for amusement—"

"Hain't no business ter," Captain Hen broke in with a snort. "What's folks goin' to do that gets burned?"

Trueman's seriousness deepened.

"Wash it off, Cap'n Hen," he said, "wash it off, before it bites in. Sunshine, wind, water, tobacco smoke—and a good heart—that's the prescription. Let the old world rave. This little section is going to, any way—" He broke off to turn to his dory, shaking off the old seaman's restraining hand, as though his last word had been said. His eyes—far-seeing eyes—glanced out over the water to the light-ship that swung at its moorings. He pushed off the dory and leapt in, casting a weather eye at the sky.

"Fine weather!" he commented in his every-day voice.

From his place on the shore, where he stood with his chubby legs far apart and his hands stuck deep in his trousers pockets, Captain Hen snorted, almost out of patience.

"Kain't never tell when a squall's comin' up."

Trueman picked up an oar and shoved the boat into deeper water. He smiled.

"Always can trim sail when one does—if one's a sailor," he replied.

Captain Hen emitted what he fondly believed to be a sigh, the while he tugged beneath his chin.

"Hope yer right," he said bluntly.

The smile on the big lightship captain's face grew more genial. He seemed not to have a care in the world.

"Know I am," he nodded. "Bye, Cap'n. Don't worry too much. Spoils your sailing eye." His last words reached the older man from far out where the distance-eating strokes had taken him.

With a droop to his broad old shoulders, Captain Hen watched until Trueman in the boat was a small spot in the water. His fringe of whiskers shook with his head, as he turned to plod off toward the town.

It was a forlorn little wife humped over in the grass under a cedar tree on the knoll, idly watching a distant sail, who finally caught sight of Trueman's familiar dory as it came within her ken.

"He's gone away from me," she murmured, "when I need him most."

With a sad little sigh Martha gathered herself together and walked slowly around the little headland to the beach, where Dorothy Merrill found her at sundown as she and Jack Billings were returning from one of their two-some picnics farther up the shore.

With a pleased cry, Dorothy left the youth who was her constant attendant, to run to Martha, whose every curve showed her so disconsolate. And with an understanding that is innate in some men, Jack Billings did not at once follow the girl, to follow whom was his chief occupation such summer days. It took but a glance to show that something was wrong,—very wrong, and rightly enough the youth felt that Dorothy alone could soothe the injured feelings of the other girl better than if he were along. He busied himself, at a distance, with tossing pebbles into the water.

"Martha!" Dorothy called gayly, "where have you been—we looked and looked for you to-day to go after crabs with us, and—why, what's the matter?" She broke off to look seriously at the young wife who raised red-rimmed eyes to meet her own laughing ones. Quickly she slid into the sand beside Trueman Tisdale's wife. Her arm went sympathetically about her.

"What is it?" she repeated.

But Martha's head only shook pathetically.

"Nothing," she replied, as her fingers picked at

the cloth of her rumpled gown, "Nothing—I'm lonely, I guess."

But Dorothy Merrill, with the understanding of all women, knew that loneliness was not the entire cause of misery she could see so plainly depicted on the face of the girl she had chosen as her friend. Too, she had heard the latest about Martha and Sanderson. It had been so freely discussed at Mrs. Lou Barzum's breakfast table that Dorothy herself had left in high indignation after a futile endeavor to tell the gossipers what was her opinion of them severally, and to vow she did not believe one word against Martha. Her only reward had been the whispered comment she had heard as she flounced out—a comment from the spinster, Miss Lord, who had been so taken up by the women of the Neptune Auxiliary, to the effect that "birds of a feather—"

Now with the pitiful tear-stained face before her, it all came back to her.

"Cats!" hissed Dorothy Merrill, under her breath, but it was in the same tone of lightness that she looked over her shoulder at the youth at his pebble-throwing, and called: "Jack, come here, quick! Here's a little baby girl who has been a-crying because she is 'lonely'. What shall we do with her?"

Dorothy leapt to her feet and clapped her hands in glee as Jack came forward.

"Oh! I have it!" she exclaimed. "We'll take her over to the hotel with us to-night to the dance—"

Martha Tisdale's heart lost a beat or two as she

heard her. A dance! At the Point Hotel! But it could not be.

"Oh, Dorothy," she gasped, "I—I couldn't—"

"Just why, I'd like to know, Mrs. Trueman Tisdale," demanded the girl from the city. "You're free, white, and twenty-one, aren't you—and you can do as you please, can you not—we'll send Jack out in Cap'n Hen's motor boat to tell your husband you're going and you needn't mind anything or anyone else—"

"Yes, yes, certainly—that's the stuff!" Jack Billings put in his plea eagerly. Like Dorothy, he, too, had come to think much of this waif of fortune whom his wanderings about the town had shown him had no easy time of it in such a gossiping community. "Come on—I'll get going now, before it's dark."

A dance! with young people like herself! The bright lights of the big hotel! The music! How often had she heard it faintly from across the harbor and wondered what it would be like to be among the people in those big rooms and on those wide verandas. She felt that she should not, but she could not but think of it. What harm would it be, after all, to go there with Dorothy and Jack! Surely the people in Bayport could find nothing wrong with that. They could not accuse her of going any place to meet Nate Sanderson. She hesitated, and like all hesitators, was lost.

"But I—I—I'm afraid I've nothing—" She glanced down at her own crumpled gown, and it was the wise Dorothy who knew the rest.

"Now I know what you're going to say," she announced, "you're going to say you've nothing to wear. You have. You're going to wear my blue chiffon—it'll be lovely with your dark hair and brown eyes!" She danced about excitedly.

Martha Tisdale stood up half totteringly. She smiled whimsically as Dorothy wound an arm about her waist as the three started up the beach. She smiled anticipatorily as she hesitatingly told them:

"It will be nice—you know, I—I've never worn an evening gown!"

CHAPTER X

THEY were the lights that first claimed Martha Tisdale's attention; widened her eyes and quickened her heart—the lights of the big hotel—and the smell of the roses. Opaque-globed incandescents, shedding their soft glow that sent kindly beams out to make a dusk on the wide porches with the clustered wicker chairs, their cool depths inviting to a languid rest and companionship.

Rosy-hued tall lamps on white-clothed tables—a shimmer from crystal-fringed globes—but lights, lights everywhere, that made of the big summer hotel on the Point an oasis of brightness in the blackness of the encircling pines and the darkness of ocean waters, with only the twin lights of the lightship, far out to the westward, to break its sombreness.

Like all Bayporters, Martha Tisdale had long been accustomed to the lights of the hotel, in the distance. Like all of them, too, she had been over to the summer resort many times, but, until this night, such visits had ended a hundred yards or so from the wide porches, with their quota of well-dressed summer visitors. Bayporters never intruded themselves onto those porches. They were ever on the outside looking in.

The girl-wife's breath came quick as she stepped

from the little motor boat in which she and Dorothy Merrill had been guided by Jack Billings from the small cove near the Tisdale home. They had decided against the Bayport ferry which was the usual way of reaching the hotel across the river, for as Dorothy Merrill had agreed with Martha: "What they don't know in Bayport, won't hurt them."

So Jack had engaged Captain Hen Berry's motor boat and had himself piloted his guests across the river's mouth where it emptied into the ocean.

Those bright lights had struck Martha with a blinding flash as the small craft bumped against the landing in front of the hotel. Already the dancing had begun, and the soft strains reached them more fully than they had when the party had been out on the water where the "put-put" of the motor had claimed first attention. Young Billings sprung out lightly and held out his hands to Dorothy and Martha. Exuberant-spirited herself, Dorothy could not understand why Martha hung back.

"Oh, come on," she urged. "You're going to have a good time for once in your life, and forget a lot of cats, and it will do you good. Why, there won't be a soul here who will be as beautiful as you are—all fixed up and everything. You will have them all wondering who you are! Won't she, Jack?" turning to her companion who still held out his hand to his reluctant guest.

But though Jack Billings grinned his cheerful grin as he enthusiastically agreed, there was that in his eyes as they held on Dorothy, herself, that showed

him to be making some inward reservations about beauty.

Indeed, Martha Tisdale had no cause to worry over her personal appearance. The long swinging glass in Mrs. Lou Barzum's best room had proven that to her as she had stood and beheld herself with delighted eyes, in the depths of which was a hint of wistfulness. The delicate blue of Dorothy's loaned gown set off to all their advantage the midnight of Martha's hair and the soft brown of her eyes. And in comparison to her, a foil, Dorothy had looked like a beam of sunshine as she had stood beside her —Dorothy in her own gown of gold hue to match her sunny locks.

Once across the porch and into the wide, lighted rotunda of the hotel, Martha's spirits rose. It was the lights—the music—the roses. Not such roses as grew in her own garden, or in the carefully tended beds of her Bayport neighbors, but big, luxuriant, subtle-odor-breathing roses that nodded on their long stems from crystal vases and tall brass holders —roses everywhere!

The big Point hotel was in gala attire. It was the occasion of the largest mid-season dance, and guests had arrived from Boston—from New York, from smaller centers—for the one purpose of attending it.

Once in the laughing, subduedly-murmuring crush —once one of them, and not singled out conspicuously—the girl from Bayport began to lose her self-consciousness. But her heart beat faster and faster

as her senses reeled with the perfumes around her—the perfume of the roses, and the less easily distinguished, but more intoxicating scents of the well-gowned women who floated past her.

She seemed in a dream. Forgotten for the time was all the pain she had that day endured through the backward-leaning Puritanism of her unjust neighbors and step-mother-in-law. Forgotten even for a moment the pangs over Trueman's not caring—the lack of love on his part she believed she had uncovered. This was life! Something she had hitherto only dreamed about!

But in acknowledging her forgetting, it must not be overlooked that, after all, Martha Tisdale was only a girl; a girl to whom all that by right should come to one young and lovely had been denied; whose life had been a sordid nightmare of social ostracism for no fault of her own until she had become Trueman Tisdale's wife, then—

"Some peach!" big blonde "Chappie" McGrew, he of college crew fame, was whispering to Jack Billings. "Who is she?"

"Why, Miss Merrill," was the surprised reply. "You know her—"

"Chappie" shook his head.

"Of course; of course," he agreed, "but I mean the other one with your own beauty—the peaches and creamy, cosmeticless queen of the night—"

"Oh!" Billings was not much interested. "One of the Bayporters—Mrs. Trueman Tisdale."

"Ah, married, eh?" the other queried. "Hadn't

you better watch your step, old thing? You know these small town gossips."

Jack Billings grinned, but his eyes rested on Dorothy Merrill as she floated by in the arms of a white-flanneled youth. "Oh! me, you mean!" he laughed. "I—I'm chaperoned!"

Vaguely Martha was aware of the introduction of "Chappie" McGrew. She felt her cheeks grow warm with some delicious new feeling as she realized his admiring glances.

"Will you dance?" he asked her.

And the whole scene once more became a fairy-land and she a dream princess as she felt herself drawn by the famous stroke oar into the throng that drifted across the waxed dance floor, a floor whose shining surface reflected glint for glint the sparkle of the myriad lights in the domed ceiling above.

Ah! This was life! Seen through the golden haze of a silken-shaded glow—sensed through the perfume of a garden of Araby!

Again and again she danced. Dorothy's prediction that the little villager would be a sensation had come true. But more and more it seemed unreal. Could this be she—Martha Tisdale, wife of Trueman, the sombre? This shining-eyed, pink-cheeked creature in the blue gown whose image she glimpsed as she glided by the long mirrors? She felt like pinching herself to find out. She even laughed aloud as the thought came of what Ma Tisdale or Mehitable Sands or even Mrs. Caleb Fish would think—or say—could they but see her.

What did it matter what they said—ever? She could laugh at them this night. She could laugh at the seriousness with which she had taken their clacking.

Trueman came into her mind as she noted the fine physiques of some of the athletic young men who were her dance partners. Why would Trueman never do anything of this kind for her? Why, he never took her anywhere! He hadn't since last year's strawberry festival on the church lawn, that time Mehitable Sands had so loudly lamented the spoiling of her wine-colored silk dress, the same she had been "making over" for half a decade or so.

A filmy cloud passed over the young wife's eyes as she gave thought to her husband. Why could he not understand that she was young, that she loved life—and him! There was a little clutch at her heart as she recalled her conclusion that Trueman had ceased to care for her, if he ever had—much—or at least as much as he cared for his work of tending lightship.

It was no time, though, for serious thoughts. The light came back into her eyes' dark depths as she swung to the lilt of the music. Dorothy Merrill danced by in the arms of Jack Billings. She waved her hand to Martha as she laughed:

"Having a good time?"

Martha's one answered word held a world of fervor.

"Wonderful!"

So Martha Tisdale, wearing her first evening

gown, conscious of the beauty of her white arms and neck, danced, but . . .

In the rooms of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Neptune Club, over the original quarters which they had pirated, the women of Bayport were making a Roman holiday. Neither Ma Tisdale nor Mehitable Sands had been able to hurry their supper dishes fast enough to suit them in their eagerness to reach the club and spread Mehitable's first-hand news—her real scandal about seeing Trueman Tisdale's wife in the arms of Nate Sanderson.

As if sensing something unusual, the other members had drifted in early, so that long before they could hear old Captain Tony downstairs lonesomely striking eight bells on the big chowder pot in the galley, there was a full quota—a buzzing of excitement. Hands were raised in holy indignation, eyes lowered or lifted to flash fire as Mehitable recounted her experience of the afternoon—an experience that lost nothing in embellishments after its oft repeating.

Martha Tisdale was up for sentence. Within the short space of an hour, while the young wife was gayly dancing, over in the brightly-lighted music-filled hotel, across on the Point, she had been tried without a hearing, and on the circumstantial evidence produced, had been condemned. Almost to a member, the women of the Neptune Auxiliary were in favor of socially "shooting her at sunrise."

With a martyred air, Ma Tisdale put in her plaint:

"Oh, I'm so sick and tired of all her goin's on,"

she complained, but there was a sparkle in her faded eyes behind the square-rimmed specs that showed how hugely she was enjoying it all. "But there don't seem nuthin' a law-'bidin' church member in good standin' kin do, what with a son-in-law like mine with a temper like a mule—"

Mehitable Sands rose in her might.

"Somethin's got to be done!" she declared, and her jaws shut with a snap that drew her thin lips into a line. "The wimmen of this town's got to purge theirselves of th' disgrace that's been brought on 'em by this—this critter!"

She did not see the look that flitted across the face of Mrs. Anastasia Fish as she dropped a stitch in her knitting to glance up keenly at the speaker. Mrs. Fish was always knitting when there was nothing else to do—knitting one of her eternal comforters which Captain Caleb sported in the cold weather. Mehitable hurried on.

"What's to do?" she demanded of the assembled members at large. "We can't chuck her out of the Auxiliary, 'cause we didn't let her in, thank the Lord! But we'd ought to take a vote that any woman that speaks to her will be expelled."

Mrs. Fish laid down her knitting and grimly arose. She went into battle in earnest.

"Then you kin fire me out right now, ef ye do," she shot out at them. "Maybe Martha's been foolish and done wrong—I dunno. Who ain't, sometime or other? But I speak to worse'n her every

'day—and I'm goin' to treat her decent. And that's flat. Now ye go ahead and vote, ef ye want to!"

This, of course, would never do. Agree or not with Anastasia Fish, each member knew that the large lady's position was unassailable. She might do as she pleased, with the full assurance that she would not be voted out. For one thing, she was too valuable a member. Even had she not been the wife of the town's richest man and leading citizen, she was valuable for her own energetic self. She was admittedly the best chowder cook in the neighborhood, as others than Captain Hen could testify—the most valuable member they had for their Washington's Birthday and Fourth of July celebrations—and the best hand in the entire club for doing things when things needed to be done that involved executive capacity and hustle. No, Anastasia Fish's position in the club was secure. But she had spoken, and was not through speaking, though she was through with any active club meeting for the night. She reached down and gathered up her knitting, but when she straightened up her eyes were on Mehitable Sands and Ma Tisdale, though she spoke to all inclusively:

"You all make me sick!" she sniffed, "and besides, I'm hungry. Prob'ly some of them men folks we promised allus to feed on club meetin' nights be, too, while we set here a-slanderin'—"

With all pennants flying, Mrs. Anastasia Fish sailed out of the room, much like a ship under full canvas.

So the ostracism of Martha Tisdale, instead of

being officially proclaimed, was left to the individual choice of the members—all of whom but one or two warm admirers and adherents of Mrs. Fish, declared their intention to cut her dead.

Captain Tony Keeney was no longer alone when Martha's champion had made her labored way down the steep stairs into the main club room. Captain Lem had "come aboard" and the checker game was making as fair progress as might be expected of players who were all too conscious of the feminine buzz above decks.

Captain Caleb and Captain Hen, too, had wandered in from somewhere—and Ozra Hemingway, keen on the scent of home-cooked food, and the gossip he knew would be disseminated when the Auxiliary meeting had dispersed.

Mrs. Fish had not trimmed a single sheet when she sailed into the room and made for the well-filled basket she had stored in the club lockers. For a moment, so intent was she on her own indignation, that she did not speak. But there was not one of the men present who did not know that the calm was only temporary, and as Captain Tony mumbled under his breath to Captain Lem, they were in for some high weather for the clouds about "were a scud of sailors." Before her first words, the old men shifted their positions uneasily. Even Ozra, anxious as he was for women's words—though not those of Mrs. Fish—glanced about uneasily for a means of exit should it become necessary to beat a strategic retreat.

The checker game came to an abrupt close, as the

two captains moved toward the rear windows in a roundabout way. Mrs. Fish was energetically setting the place to rights before donning her big apron for her turn in the galley. Surreptitious glances shot her way showed the fear of the old mariners, but they were carefully-veiled glances, for none of them cared to bring down on his head the wrath of Mrs. Caleb Fish, however much it might not be a vituperative wrath, but still it was words—women's words. Then Mrs. Fish spoke.

"Wal," she demanded, as she stood with both hands parked on her capacious hips, "ain't nobuddy goin' to help me? S'pose you men ain't got nuthin' to do but sit on yer britches, and we wimmen a-breakin' our necks to feed ye up on club nights."

Captain Lem took off his hat and sighed prodigiously.

"Guess I'll be gittin' down to th' wharf," he said, as he sidled toward the door. But Mrs. Fish was not noticing him. Her gaze was on Ozra Hemingway, who discreetly but ostentatiously moved away from her as she passed him.

"Humph!" she snapped. "I won't bite yer, Oz Hemingway, even if I'd like to."

It was Captain Caleb who approached her meekly, took up the big basket and turned toward the galley, a move which caused a flicker of amusement to cross the face of the bachelor, Captain Hen, who missed no phase of it. Captain Caleb plodded obediently toward the galley. His spouse followed. She glanced keenly at him.

"What did ye say, Caleb?" she asked.

The big Captain sighed.

"I wasn't sayin' nuthin', Anastasia," was the meek reply.

Mrs. Fish sniffed, as she eased her ample bulk into the small club kitchen and took the basket her husband passed in to her. Captain Caleb walked uneasily toward his mates. Captain Hen sensed it was no proper time to comment on Captain Caleb's marital affairs, so he sought to change the subject.

"Reckon the wimmin's been havin' a whale of a time up there to-night," he commented. "Lots to talk about after what I heered Mehit Sands is been a-sayin'."

Captain Caleb nodded solemnly as the other went on.

"True Tisdale came ashore this mornin'. I seed him at the wharf. Nate Sanderson was comin' along th' street, too; 'low he met him."

Ozra Hemingway snorted.

"True Tisdale ain't never goin' to learn nuthin'," he gabbled.

Captain Caleb turned on the little wizened gossipmonger with a heavy frown.

"He ain't the only one," he boomed, "by godfrey! Not by a long shot."

Captain Hen was too thoughtful to notice the passage of arms which was a regular thing in the club when Ozra Hemingway was present.

"Nate's a trim looker, for sure," commented Captain Hen, dolefully. "Lookin' at him that way only,

ye can't blame the wimmin folks takin' to him. Smart young mate on a Boston packet sizes up considerable bettern' a lot of water-logged hulls."

"Guess that's how Martha Tisdale figgered it. She—" Ozra's venom was not allowed to get under way.

"Hold yer tongue, Oz Hemingway," roared Captain Caleb.

Ozra reared back on his heels angrily, and one suspender snapped rhythmically as he flicked it back and forth with his thumb—a motion Bayporters knew well, as a sure index of the small sea-cook's frame of mind. Let Ozra get excited, or angry, and his suspender strap threatened to come loose from its button moorings with the wild snaps its owner gave it. For this was just another proof that Ozra Hemingway was the club's pessimist. He couldn't trust anything—even the belt that held up his trousers. Long ago the rest of the members had given up the "galluses" that had so valiantly performed their duty in another day, and taken to the more modern belt. Not so Ozra. A belt he wore, to be sure, but he reinforced it with the suspenders that did principal duty in indicating his state of mind. The suspender snapped. He thrust his wrinkled face forward belligerently.

"I pay taxes 'round here," he snorted. "I—"

"Mebbe—on a gas jet at th' town hall." Captain Caleb's tone was dry, but his sarcasm no more shut up the small man than did his roar.

"Now, lookee here, Caleb Fish," he threatened. "I've tooken enough offen you—"

"Then watch where ye're sailin'."

Captain Caleb turned from the man contemptuously, his last word said, but it might as well have been anyway, for the door opened and Ma Tisdale blew in.

"Blew in" is the correct way to describe the entrance of Trueman Tisdale's step-mother, for on the instant of her arrival a somberness and drabness of the atmosphere was apparent, much like the drafty effects that preceded the doldroms of a tropic whaling cruise, which all good whalemen dreaded.

Ma's eyes wandered about the room critically.

"Howdy, Mis' Tisdale." Cheerful soul that he was, it was Captain Hen who offered the lanky woman a greeting. But he had his trouble for his pains, for Ma Tisdale chose to ignore him.

"Where's 'Stasia Fish?" she inquired, but the inquiry was directed at no one in particular. She peered into the galley. "Oh, there ye be, be ye?" she sniffed. "Fixin' fer these here men what ain't got a thought save for their stummicks when everything be as wrong as hit is—Wal, I fer one, won't help this night—I'm too wrought up—the rest'll be here in a minit, but as for me, I'm jest sick and tired—"

She stopped her querulous plaint to glance at Ozra who came toward her eagerly for what he believed he was about to hear.

Captain Caleb spread his legs apart, sailor fashion, and looked down at Ma from his great height, as his wife came from the galley wiping her hands. She didn't seem any too pleased at Ma's appearance nor her comments, either, but it was her husband who spoke first.

"Wal, what seems to be the symptoms this time, Mis' Tisdale?" he inquired, a bit facetiously, a facetiousness at which Martha's step-mother-in-law took offense. She bridled as she answered:

"And well kin you ask, Caleb Fish. Hit ain't your home that's bein' besmirched. Seems like it was bad enough before when that—that—Martha and Nate Sanderson was a paradin' before everyone—right out thar in the street—in clear daylight. That was scandalous enough, but now—" She spread her hands wide as though the subject were one too much for her. Captain Caleb was soothing.

"Now, now, Mis' Tisdale, ye ain't fair. Martha ain't hurt no one—"

Ma Tisdale's hands went up in the air.

"Th' Lord save us!" she ejaculated with an injured air.

"He won't, if ye keep yer slanderin' tongues a-goin'. I fer one am sick and tired of it, too." Ma Tisdale fairly jumped and even Captain Caleb looked surprised at the temerity of Captain Hen Berry as he bitterly had his say. But Captain Caleb would not let his shipmate show more courage than he.

"So be I," he announced firmly, but not without a

sidelong glance at his wife, who had turned and seemed unconscious of the conversation, as her whole attention was apparently on the marine glass she was inspecting.

Ma Tisdale's shoulders shrugged angrily. "You men are all alike," she averred. "What one says t'other stands by it."

"Lord!" Captain Caleb attempted an aside to Captain Hen, but his rumble was all too plainly heard. "Now ain't that jest like a woman?"

Captain Hen had "got away" with his first volley. He was encouraged. There was so much more he wanted to say. What time could there be better than this? He pulled at one side of his fringe of whiskers—the characteristic of him when unduly excited as was Ozra's snapping of his suspenders. His good-natured countenance was as grim as its rotundity would permit.

"If some of ye wimmin was half as free with yer Christian charity as ye are tryin' to make Martha Tisdale's life miser'ble," he fairly spat out, "all I kin say is that life 'round this town would be lesser'n a floatin' hell."

"Such langwidge!" Ma Tisdale wailed as she sought to admonish the too brave old captain. "Men are a lot of fools—the hull of them. Look at True Tisdale—"

Captain Hen turned on his heel as though he had said enough. But he could not forbear one backward-flung opinion as he left Ma Tisdale in the center of the room beside the long table which she

had begun hastily to prepare for the meal, with hands that shook with wrath as she contemplated the injury her step-daughter-in-law had done her, and now the fact that three times in one evening she had found folks who took up for her.

"I have been lookin' at him," said Captain Hen, "and thinkin' 'bout him, too. And what I've got to say is that 'stead of goin' on tellin' all about him and everythin', it might help a heap sight more if some of ye wimmin told him how to shed his infernal New England clussness, and let some words loose to his wife now and then—right words that wimmin have a right to expect."

"By godfrey!" said Captain Caleb. "An' no one thought to hi'st the storm signals."

Captain Tony chuckled and grinned his toothless grin. "Storm signals?" he asked in a hoarse whisper that carried through the room and was even caught by Mehitable Sands and others of the Auxiliary who were entering to aid in the supper getting. "Storm signals? Hurricane, ye mean—a whole shipload of red lanterns and signal guns! Watch out yer anchor chains don't bust, Cap'n Hen."

And the oldest captain of them all, who was always for peace save when the fighting was all left to Captain Lem and himself in their checker games, turned to watch Mrs. Anastasia Fish, and to change the conversation.

Mrs. Fish, in her inspection of the marine glass, was peering through the wrong end.

"Hey, there, ma'am," Captain Tony addressed

her. "Telescope's meant to look out with, not in." He chuckled.

But Mrs. Fish continued to look into the wrong end. She nodded over her shoulder toward where Ozra Hemingway was eagerly clacking in subdued tones with Mehitable and others of the feminine contingent.

"Better turn it on some of the folks inside, I 'low," she said deliberately, with a meaning that the gossipers could not misunderstand.

CHAPTER XI

TRUEMAN TISDALE, pipe in mouth, leaned over the rail of Ripping Reef lightship, and gazed in toward the brilliant lights of the big hotel on the Point, five miles away. The brilliance cut through the midnight blackness between with meteor-like sharpness. There was no way of distinguishing the distance in the surrounding blackness—a blackness that was relieved only by the two ribbons of light reflected from the twin lights of the lightship, that cut narrow wakes in the shimmery water near at hand, and which, far out past the rocks, were the beacons that were eagerly sought by the steersmen of passing craft.

The moon had not risen, and the few stars visible seemed far away, too far away to lighten the blackness, or to be familiar, as they usually were, to the small crew of the anchored lightship whose sequestered life made them look on each star as a personal friend.

It was still, too—still and calm. The big lightship swung with mooring chains up and down, for it was slack water, and no wind was stirring. It was deadly quiet—so quiet that small noises from shoreward could easily be distinguished.

The lightship captain's thoughts were shoreward, though not on the big hotel. He was inwardly

visioning his own home, on the opposite point of land—the home he could not see save in his mind's eye, and the girl wife who waited there for him, and set her beacon light in the window. Trueman Tisdale idly wondered by what chance it was impossible this night to see the never-varying lights in his own windows.

So intent was he on his own thoughts that he even did not hear the musical whining of the concertina with which the ship's cook was entertaining himself, on a coiled rope on the deck behind him. The musician was softly crooning a chantey. When the words did reach the captain he smiled reminiscently. He had heard those words so often before—had been taught them even in his boyhood, before he had been a cabin-boy—at the knee of old Captain Hen Berry, whose teachings were still going on among the youth of Bayport.

Nasally, the cook chanted:

"'Bout the year 1 B.C.,
A gallant ship put out to sea—
To catch a whale, and salt his tail,
To salt the end of his tail.
But just 'bout a mile from land
The ship began to dance
And ev'ry son of a sailorman
Put on his working pants—
His pants—his pants—his working pants.
And down inter th' hold they went,
And over th' pumps their backs they bent—
They thought they'd drown,
But they couldn't sit down—
The floor was too wet to sit down—"

What a good sort old Captain Hen was, to be sure! Trueman realized how concerned the old man had been about a bit of gossip about Martha, and he smiled—a musing smile. How ridiculous it all was—preposterous! But his smile faded again as his thoughts grew deeper. He was thinking, seriously. He had been doing a lot of it since the morning Ma Tisdale had so malevolently sought to destroy his faith in his young wife. He was wondering now—wondering. Had he been altogether fair with Martha? How often she had begged him to leave the lightship and come ashore to live. Was it possible he had not given her a fair chance? Of course, it was ridiculous to imagine that anything she had done had been wrong—that was just Ma Tisdale's evil imagination, but his jaws set more tightly as he realized that what he had done was to leave the girl he had married to be the butt of Ma's dislike and the malicious tongue of promiscuous gossip.

"She's only a young girl, after all," he murmured with moving lips from which no sound came. "Probably she needs more looking after than I've given her—"

Called stern, unresponsive, even believed so by his own wife, no one knew as Trueman Tisdale himself knew in his own heart how untrue this was—how much he would have liked to have thrown off the mantle of repression which years of solemn communion with the deep and with his own thoughts had brought about, and to have said in words and shown in actions how deeply he really felt. It was his very

depth of feeling that made it impossible for him to consider for one moment that there might be one word of truth in what the gossips said, for, believing as he did himself, that marriage was all-embracing, was truly "for better, for worse," it was not in his nature to believe that the woman to whom he had given his heart could think otherwise than himself. His faith in her was absolute—he could not imagine that hers might not be.

But Captain Hen's few words had given him disturbing thoughts. He had loved Martha, yes—had honored her—but could it be possible he had not protected her? And was not that part of the bounden duty of a man—part of his solemn contract of marriage?

Trueman Tisdale mused, his thoughts far away from all about him. Members of the crew came on deck to loll under the stars and join in the hummed chanteys. Indistinctly he heard the engineer busy in the big round engine house up forward, one of the box-like apparatus from which reared the two masts with their everlasting fixed lights. He was vaguely conscious of the back and forth ramblings of Martin Avery, his first mate, who was making a pathway along the deck with his measured footsteps and turnings.

Idly he wondered what could be bothering Martin. Usually he would be bent over a book at this time of the night, for he knew that the young man was preparing himself for an examination in the hope of going through college, the hope of his

mother who was straining every effort to gain this ambition for her fatherless son. But he was too intent on his own thoughts.

Again and again the lights of the big hotel came up before him to disturb him. Why was he noticing those lights more than usual to-night? They were always there, and he had often watched them, leaning over the rail smoking his pipe as he was now. They seemed brighter, somehow—had a deeper significance. Sort of a personal one, it seemed. As the music of the concertina stopped for a moment, there was also borne out to him from across the black waters, the sound of orchestraed music.

Martin Avery paused beside the rail at which his captain stood. A side glance at his mate showed Trueman Tisdale the nervous throbbing of the throat of the other where it was exposed by the open-necked blue flannel shirt. What could be troubling Martin? But it was not Trueman Tisdale's way to ask. He nodded toward the lights of the big hotel.

"Must be having quite a time ashore over there to-night," he commented. "Music hasn't stopped since six bells."

For a moment the other did not answer. Then he burst out with a bitterness that was unusual for a man trained to the stolidness and even tenor of a lightship existence:

"Folks ashore have all the best of it! I—"

Trueman Tisdale turned and looked a moment into the eyes of the young man into whose depths

he could see by the shaft of light that cut across from the open door of the cabin and up the steps leading to the deck.

"What is it, Martin?" he asked. What is troubling you—"

It was a long way for Trueman Tisdale to go in other people's affairs, but something hinted to him of a seriousness in this matter. Avery hesitated, and stammered, then he burst out:

"It's my mother!" he said. "She's sick,—and—oh, well, you know she wants me—"

Silence for one moment more, then came Trueman Tisdale's calm and steady tones.

"Well, what's to keep you from going to her, then?"

Avery looked his surprise, and was boyishly embarrassed as he tried to tell.

"Well, you know, to-morrow's the day you go ashore for your week, and I know—we all know, how much—and I didn't like to ask, and—"

The captain's smile was grimly humorous, but the other saw only the smile.

"My garden'll keep," he announced—"my wife, too," he added inwardly—Martha just must trust him a little while longer, and here was duty calling again; duty, the thing that a Tisdale never shirked. He turned from the rail and hailed a passing seaman.

"Oh, Gallup!" he called. "Take the dory and put Avery ashore at once."

As he went over the rail, only the tight hand

clasp that his first mate gave him thanked Trueman Tisdale, but it was enough. He watched the boat out over the wake of the waters, and if there was a sigh, he repressed it. He would make it all up to Martha somehow.

With the distant music of the hotel orchestra in his ears, his thoughts returned to her. Yes, things would have to be different. He would have to find some way of getting rid of Ma Tisdale. She would have to go. He remembered how close he had come to telling her so that morning in the kitchen, but it was the Tisdale way to go slowly and surely. But now that his mind was made up, it was settled. Trueman Tisdale would give all Bayport, not alone his step-mother, to understand that he would no longer ignore the attacks on his wife. As for Nate Sanderson—his lips shut grimly in earnest. Nate Sanderson would be attended to.

To-morrow morning he would leave his second officer in charge long enough to go ashore and try to let Martha know his conclusions. He was determined, as he had never been before, to be her champion and guardian as well as her husband. Of course, he would have to give up the lightship, and it was not without a pang that he let his eyes rove over the familiar deck. The Tisdales had captained this so long! Never mind! He had a craft of his own to captain—he was needed elsewhere, and the Tisdale duty—

It was not an unpleasant picture that was conjured

up, either, in spite of the thought of living ashore. There would be the cozy sitting room—himself with slippers on his feet, sitting under the lamp on the center table, reading his Gazette—and he could vision the glimpse of Martha as she would look up with that lovelight in her eyes from across the table as she busied herself with her sewing. Happiness sang in his heart; contentment grew. The world was all right!

An exclamation from the ship's cook aroused him from his reverie.

"Danged birds!" exploded that individual. "Kain't tell night from day!"

Trueman Tisdale turned from his position at the rail.

"What's bothering you now, Gorman," he good-naturedly asked.

The other pointed to the fluttering birds that circled about the mast lights, trying to find a roosting place, their fluttering and noise interfering with his own concertina music.

"You a sailorman, and talking about Mother Carey's Chickens!" Trueman was mildly remonstrative.

"They bring good luck to a vessel; they drive away the evil spirits." The lightship captain's tone had become almost jocular.

The musical cook got up from his coil of rope, his concert finished for the night.

"Maybe," he said, "maybe. I guess they're spirits

all right. But I wish't some of these spirits wouldn't be so danged noisy."

Trueman was not listening. He was following his own train of thought. He glanced up at the masthead lights contentedly before he started to turn in, and his thoughts were songs as he contemplated his new resolutions.

CHAPTER XII

MIDNIGHT came more swiftly to Martha Tisdale than it ever had before, in all her experience of keeping vigil from her bed in the little old-fashioned bedroom in the Tisdale homestead, with its windows that overlooked the ocean and the twin lights of the lightship where her husband watched or slumbered.

It did not find her tired, but emotionally exhausted, though she did not recognise the experience. Things had happened in such rapid succession; there was so much to think about—new. The country-bred girl had never really known what physical exhaustion was; hers had been too healthy an open air existence, with the breath of the life-giving sea breezes always in her nostrils, for her to have known more than the passing tiredness of Nature when sleep time came. Now, there came over her an unaccustomed lassitude—a languor she could not explain—but nerves bade her go on.

Dorothy Merrill, pausing while she ate an ice, noted the feverishness of the girl's expression. She laid down her plate and reached for Martha's hand.

"Stifling in here, isn't it?" she asked sympathetically. "Let's have Jack take us outside. I know the coziest little nook out on the East porch, where we

can look out over the ocean and have the salt air blow some of the perfume out of our systems."

Down at the end of one of the hotel porches where it curved into a bayed nook, they found unoccupied chairs. They were far from the music of the instruments, and the salt air was as soothing as Dorothy had believed it would be. For a few moments they lolled there. Then the more sophisticated girl sat up suddenly as she heard a new refrain.

"Jack!" she cried to young Billings, who was vainly trying to make his sixth collar sit up and act natural, as he inserted experienced fingers between its perspiration-wrinkled folds and his own neck. "They're playing a waltz—actually! *A bas* jazz! And it's a waltz I haven't heard since I was a kid —I learned to play it then—'The Jolly Fellows'—oh, I must dance it!"

She was on her feet and swaying to the lilt of the unaccustomed melody.

"Come on!" she begged, both arms held out, but then she remembered her guest. "Hurry," she said to the reluctant youth, "get her a partner—"

But Martha shook her head.

"I—I believe I'm tired a—little," she murmured. "Go ahead and dance—I'll wait for you here—it's so cool and pleasant, and—" Her companions did not see the glance she gave seaward, nor did they note the specks of light that held her.

Martha Tisdale was wondering what Trueman was doing—what he would say if he knew where she was. Oh, he couldn't object to her having this one

good time—this good time after the horrors of the days that had preceded. Her eyes held on the lights and she was unnoticing of the departure of Dorothy and Billings as the girl who had made herself her friend moved lightly off in dance rhythm to join the dancers on the floor.

She did not know how long she sat there. The lassitude that had overtaken her made her dreamy. She was thinking of Trueman, and of—Everything that had been happening in Bayport seemed of so little consequence———

She was roused from her reverie by the white-flanneled man who sauntered by. How strangely familiar he was. Where had she seen him before?

The man in white flannels, with the jaunty air, paused a moment in front of the place where Martha rested. She heard a glad exclamation. She sat up suddenly, then—

"Well, I've found you at last!"

She looked up to see Nate Sanderson bending over her, fervor in his dark eyes, a light of triumph. There was nothing to show that the meeting was as much of a surprise to Nate Sanderson as it was to the girl in the blue evening gown. But his eyes took in her appearance with avidity. Never had he seen Martha Tisdale like this before. Never had he seen her so desirable.

"Nate!" she cried, as she tried to rise, but his protesting hand told her to stay where she was. "How—how did you know—"

Sanderson smiled eagerly. It would never do,

now that Fate was playing into his hands so nicely to let Martha Tisdale know that he had come over to the big hotel with no idea of seeing her, but merely for the love he had of showing off himself. Nate Sanderson knew the value of a pair of masculine brown eyes; of a comely countenance; of a knowledge of how to dress that he had acquired during the years he had been mate of a Boston freighter and had spent so much of his time ashore in Boston. Truth to tell, he had come over to the summer resort, as he often had before, arrayed in all the grandeur that a good Boston tailor could concoct for such purposes, with the one determination of parading in languid manner for the benefit of those women who did not dance, but instead haunted the porches, and who were never averse to the proper advances of a good-looking stranger, were his manners correct enough.

Through the summer, it had been one of Nate Sanderson's favorite out-door sports. But there was no reason for enlightening Martha Tisdale, nor of telling her that his encounter with her was an encounter to which he had familiarized himself. Nate Sanderson had not thought of meeting Martha Tisdale when he saw a lone beauty in a blue dress in a sequestered corner. But he was elated. What the gods provided—

"So you thought no one knew you were here," he said in hurt tone. "You wrong me. Why Martha, dear, I've haunted your footsteps—I've known wherever you went, and I thought if I waited long

enough, you might be kind—" He stopped just the dramatically long enough time for her to realize his words, then went on hesitatingly. "You wouldn't give me a chance to explain—I hadn't a chance—but I so wanted to tell you how sorry I was for—well, you know, Mehitable and all that—"

Martha shuddered at the thought that brought back Bayport to her. She had been forgetting it so successfully out there alone with only the other hurting thought that perhaps Trueman did not care for her, and only cared for keeping bright those two lights she could see in the distance. She started to speak, but Sanderson forestalled her.

"I just had to say a word, to excuse myself if I could. I did not mean it—up there by the cemetery—but oh, Martha, don't you know, can't you see—everything I've done, a—all the times I've come back here between trips when I might have gone other places—must have shown you that it was because I—well—"

The man shut his lips tight as though to shut back the words, but they came out spasmodically, quite as well as those of any other seasoned actor—

"I cannot help it—it was because I loved you—and loving you, I—this morning, up there with you alone—I forgot myself—"

It was a plea that the most practiced player with affections herself could not have withstood, but Martha Tisdale drew back her hand, the possession of which the man tried to gain, as she said weakly:

"Oh, you mustn't—you mustn't say such things, Nate—"

His jaws shut tightly. "Who's to say I'm not?" he demanded, and with a sweep of his hand toward the water with its distant lights.

"Him? Huh, what does he care? No, you mustn't stop me," as she started to her feet, "I'm not through. There are other rights in the world—and to-night when I found you'd be here—I knew you were coming with your friend Dorothy and Jack Billings—" mere canny supposition on the part of the packet mate, it found its mark—"I decided to come too, to tell you some of the things I must—must!"

The girl did not look up, but her eyes drifted toward the sea.

"Please, Nate," she pleaded, "please don't say those things to me."

Sanderson regarded her for a moment, then his eyes, too, sought the horizon, a glance she did not fail to detect.

"I wonder," he burst out suddenly, "I wonder if he realizes how beautiful you are—"

"Please, Nate, please—" she lifted her hand in protest as she attempted to arise, but the man reached for the protesting member.

"Well, you are beautiful," he declared, then insinuatingly—for Nate Sanderson knew the unsophistication of the girl he had set about to win, "doesn't he ever tell you that?"

Martha could only wring her hands.

"Please, Nate, please," she repeated, but the man's answer was to fling himself down in the unoccupied chair beside her and attempt to reach for the distressed hands.

"Honestly, Martha, you are—there are few like you and I've seen lots of them—in Boston, New York, everywhere I go—they can't measure up to you—"

Distressed, the girl turned away her head. Chokingly she answered.

"You're not being fair, Nate!"

"Fair!" he exploded. "Fair! To whom! To him?" with a nod toward the lights in the distance. "Why should I be? Has he been fair to you—"

"He's my husband—" The reproof came faintly. But unnoticing, he went on.

"He's left you alone to bear the brunt of things, and I'm not hurting him much, I guess—"

"What do you mean—what can you mean?"

The girl made as if to get to her feet, but the restraining hand of the man made her subside. He bent over her tenderly.

"Oh, Martha," he pleaded, in the low voice that had so often stood him in good stead on such occasions, "don't you see—can't you see—that if you were my wife, I couldn't leave you alone? He can't love you. A man like him doesn't love anyone but himself—"

Half hysterically the girl aroused herself.

"It isn't true!" she wailed. "It isn't true! He

didn't leave me! He just had to go where his duty was—"

One significant sharp breath left the deep torso of the mate of the Boston packet.

"Duty!" he said.

The girl shivered, but she aroused herself.

"Nate Sanderson!" she said, with all the dignity that she could summon from the training of years where dignity had had no part. "You don't know what you're saying! Oh, why am I listening to you! You're talking about my husband—True—he's my husband, whatever you say—and I love him!"

There was a sob at the end of the sentence.

"But does he love you?—that's the question." The man who plead his own cause was inexorable. He had found the vulnerable point—had found the young wife just at the time when he knew her heart was sore at a fancied neglect—and none knew better than he how to take advantage of everything that was granted him.

"I'm not forgetting him," he murmured, as he once more unsuccessfully tried to gain possession of the limp hand in the girl's lap, "but would you just exactly say he was not forgetting you? You say he did not leave you alone? He left you alone enough for me to come along, didn't he? Suppose I hadn't loved you as well as I do? Suppose—Why, he's leaving you all the time. What does love mean to him? Something he's got—that's all. He forgets you're young and—"

"Nate Sanderson!"

There was a warning tone in Martha's voice as she struggled to her feet, a warning even the hardened Lothario did not fail to heed. He bowed his head in contrite manner.

"Forgive me, dear," he pleaded. "I—I couldn't help it—any more that I can bear to see you unhappy. It seems to me useless to hold back longer. I love you—you know it—what else has brought me back here so often—what do you know about how much you have been in my thoughts, the haunting of you, the vision of your face wherever I am, until something forces me back, no matter whether you're True Tisdale's wife or not—"

But Martha was not looking at him. She had risen and turned to look out over the sea at the lights she could see so plainly. What if what Nate said were true? Her own reasoning had about brought her to this conclusion hours earlier. What if True didn't love her—was only enduring her as his actions seemed to speak? What could she do—where could she turn? She scarcely heard the man who had walked to her side as she held onto the porch rail in her emotion.

"You will forgive me, Martha," he said tenderly, "you must! You know how my heart runs away with me. But there are some things I cannot unsay. I cannot bring myself to believe in the sincerity of True's love for you or to think that your own will be rewarded or appreciated. He never can. What

will your love for him ever bring you—in the future? What is it bringing you now?"

Martha choked over the words, as her thoughts, unconsciously disloyal, flew back to the day when she had sobbed out her sufferings to the unheeding ocean.

"What—what ever can you mean?" she half choked.

"Think it over!" Nate Sanderson was nonchalant. He knew when he had said enough.

"You're happy, aren't you? You are living, aren't you? Look at all this about you to-night—how often can you expect anything of this sort—as the wife of Trueman Tisdale—"

"What if I don't want it—every night—" Martha was a bit belligerent, but she had about gone her limit emotionally. The dance of the night, the unusual surroundings; now this man who sought to tell her his love, no matter how unasked (though she could not say that it was altogether spurned, since it was so truly nice to think that some one really cared for her—forlorn her) had been too much for her unsophistication. But Nate Sanderson, versed as he was in the ways of women, saw that enough had been said—the seeds of discontent sown. Another time! His mood changed.

"You're tired," he said solicitously. "Your friends should be taking you home. I can't, or I would. I—I'm sorry, Martha, if I've said too much. It was only because I cared so much, but—but if there should ever be a time when you need

me, you know I'll do everything—everything. And remember this: that whatever may happen, there are two people in the world who want you, who need you. I'm one. The other is—your father."

"No," as her hand went up in a gesture of appeal, "I was not fooling you when I said that he had been seen working on a Boston wharf. He's somewhere there, and he's one who will always love you. He wouldn't have left you if he hadn't thought it was best for you. He thought you would stand a better chance in this God-forsaken town if they could forget that you were his daughter, and—"

"If I thought he needed me—"

Martha Tisdale could not see the deceit that lay in the depths of Nate Sanderson's eyes. He had played his last card. If Martha could be persuaded to go to a father who needed her, no matter whether that father existed or not, if once she could be lured away from Bayport—Nate Sanderson smiled as he thought of the prospect. His smile was illuminative as he contemplated his prey. But his voice was soft, assuring.

"You must forget what I've said, Martha, dear," he begged. "I forget myself so at times, but it is only when my heart runs away with my judgment. But remember this: if you ever need a friend—need help, say—to go to him—your father (and you know there is some one who will always love you and want you) why I—I—Martha!" and there was a catch in his voice as he stood humbly beside her, his hands extended in friendliness and pleading for forgiveness.

"Martha!" he pleaded, "won't you remember that there is one person in the world who is only too glad to do your bidding—to do all in the world he can to make you—happy?"

The girl's eyes held a far-away look as she listened. As though from far away came the last faint strains of the encore.

Her father! If he needed her—loved her! What should she do? If she decided Trueman didn't care —She turned to the man at her side and her voice was tense as her straight young figure in its borrowed blue gown as she faced him.

"Nate Sanderson," she said, and there was a world of unspoken meaning in her voice, "I haven't liked all you've said, but perhaps you mean right. The time may come when I'll need a friend. I—I'll remember what you've said. The time's coming—has come—when the people in this town will have to let me alone—or they'll have something to talk about. Then I'll have to find my father—and—I'll remember—"

Nate Sanderson had enough experience with women to know that the gesture with Martha's white hand meant a dismissal. But he smiled as he walked down the long porch. He did not believe the dismissal was a final one. Martha Tisdale gazed long at the lights out at sea before she heard the laughter that heralded the approach of her friends.

The twin lights five miles out at sea made their ribbon-blue wakes across the black water near the lightship. They blinked—and kept their silent watch.

CHAPTER XIII

MORNING found Trueman Tisdale with none of the enthusiasm of his new resolution dimmed where his domestic affairs were concerned. Dawning clear and calm, the lightship captain felt no compunction in leaving the ship in the hands of the second officer, even though his first mate be gone. Besides, he reckoned he would be able, after seeing to a few things on shore, to be back at his station before noon. There were things to which he must attend.

His first chance came before he had been expecting it. Instead of making for the cove behind the point near his home, or landing on the small stony beach in front of it as usual, he had made directly for the Bayport wharf. The morning was yet early when he stepped ashore and walked along the town's main street, bent on stopping at the Neptune Club for a word with whomever might be around and stirring so early, before he should go to his home and see Martha, and tell her what he intended doing in the way of making things easier for her.

Trueman had not gone the distance of two city blocks when the first person he met was Nate Sanderson, jaunty, immaculately dressed, and showing no indication of the fact that he had been up till the

small hours of the morning, when he had surreptitiously watched Martha Tisdale go home with Dorothy Merrill, instead of back to the Tisdale home where she might reasonably expect a berating from Ma Tisdale unless she explained fully her reason for the late hours. Nate Sanderson had smiled when he saw this, and had in mind how it might some time or other be used to his own advantage, always supposing, however, that Dorothy Merrill was not in close enough touch with the Bayporters to refute anything he might say.

Sanderson swung along as though the world were his oyster. He had started out the morning much pleased with himself. He had in mind the conversation with Martha of the night before, and he believed that it was only a matter of time now until he could accomplish the one purpose which had been bringing him so much to the small town where he used to live—to persuade Martha Tisdale to leave her husband for him. What might happen then—well, it was not much Nate Sanderson's way to consider what might eventually happen to his victims. That was left in the laps of the gods—a question of the survival of the fittest, and Nate Sanderson had no question in his mind of his own fitness, as he sought his prey wherever it might be found.

There had already been one disturbing incident, though, to break in on the pleasant mental considerations attending his morning stroll. He had not recovered from that annoyance entirely when he ran

into Trueman Tisdale, and he was not at his best, therefore, in the resulting encounter. Early as he was out himself, he had not been earlier than Captain Caleb Fish, who was on his way to the water front, where his fishing outfit was stored. Captain Caleb loved his lobster pots and his nets and tackle. And he loved every line of his awkward-looking motor boat. He pleased himself with the thought that it was a miniature replica of his last whaling charge. With its blunt bow and its square stern it did resemble, in a small way, the old *Charles Colgate*.

Captain Caleb, catching sight of Nate Sanderson in the offing, forgot for the moment what had brought him out at the early hour. He forgot everything except the forlorn face of Martha, and the big lightship captain, her husband, whom he had ever called friend. The Boston freighter's mate was somewhat jarred out of his nonchalance as the huge figure of the ex-whaling skipper peered into his eyes as he rolled alongside.

"Mornin', Cap'n Caleb," offered Nate as Captain Caleb stopped short at sight of him.

Captain Caleb's greeting was not so hearty.

"Hello, Sanderson," he said, and he looked fixedly at him. "What ye been doin'?"

"Why, walking along, and looking the town over, and—" Nate was inclined to be humorous, but there was no humor in the keen eyes of the other man as he came closer.

"You ain't answered me yet," he observed. "What ye been doin', I asked."

The packet mate bristled. "Mindin' my own business a good part of the time, and—now see here, Cap'n Caleb," as something in the captain's eyes showed him he might expect belligerency and that the meaning was deeper than the words, "you heard what I said—and—well, I ain't beholden to you none—"

A snarl came into the voice of Captain Caleb Fish as he listened. Sanderson retreated a step as the doughty old whaler came closer, a threatening look in his eyes.

"By godfrey, that's about the only answer I'd expect from you," he said, then his hand clinched as his emotion got the better of him. "I ain't makin' no threats," he observed, as he saw the other step backward, "nor I ain't goin' to do nuthin'—not now, but what I am tellin' ye, Nate Sanderson, is that ye keep away from True Tisdale's eel pots—or gol dern ye, it'll be the wuss for ye!"

Sanderson laughed contemptuously, but there was no mirth in the laughter. He was uneasy, in spite of all efforts to be nonchalant. Captain Caleb made as if to brush by him, to go on his way. Then he stopped and turned his head to regard the packet mate on the sidewalk. His next words were full of meaning.

"Leavin' soon, Sanderson?"

Nate shrugged, as he reached for a match and scratched it on the sole of the white shoe which he had not changed since the night before, since he was

out and about without ever having gone through the ceremony of going to bed.

"Probably," he answered, unconcerned.

"By godfrey!" exploded Captain Caleb, "Seems like a good idea."

The emphasis of the huge skipper's voice had finally reached the man who had no regard for others' feelings.

"Maybe I'll carry it out," he said angrily; "but it won't be because any one has made me."

Captain Caleb had said his last word, though, and had no mind for further altercation. He was on his way to the shore with no notice of the man who stood watching him for a moment, with an angry light in his eyes. But Sanderson could not disregard the incident. For a moment he stood, then turned and swung off toward the wharf for which he had been headed, but something of his nonchalance had gone, and from the pursed up lips no whistle came.

The man who had so avowedly come back to Bayport for the purpose of seeing Martha Tisdale, was, after his encounter with Captain Caleb, in no good frame of mind to meet, at the first turning toward the dock, the husband of that young woman. But before he had warning, he had come face to face with Trueman Tisdale, just off the lightship and ready to take up the cudgels in behalf of his wife.

Trueman's shoulders straightened as he saw the packet mate, and it was with the curtest of nods that he recognized Sanderson's greeting as that individual sought to slip by him and on his way. There

was a slight pause, and Tisdale stood still, with a hand upraised to stop the other's progress.

"Well, Sanderson," he said unhumorously, "we meet early—though not often. No," as the other started off unheeding the upraised hand, "don't be in a hurry—I'm glad I met you—I've been wanting to have a talk with you."

Sanderson's expressive shoulders under their semi-nautical jaunty blue coat sleeves again shrugged.

"All right," he said carelessly. "I'm listening."

But the lightship captain did not speak for a moment. With deliberation he brought forth from his pocket his bag of tobacco and still deliberately, he began to load his pipe. When he did speak his eyes were not on the waiting man.

"Wonder what brings you to town so often, Sanderson?" he queried, coolly and collectedly. "You gave up coming down here a long time ago. You haven't any folks here any more; what's the attraction?"

A little of his usual poise lost, not only from this meeting with Tisdale and the latter's calmness, but from his previous experience with Captain Caleb, Sanderson was a bit uneasy as he answered with another question.

"'Why—er—that's a queer question, Tisdale—what are you driving at?" But before he could obtain an answer, his pugnacity returned and his jaw was thrust out as he asked nastily: "Has any one been saying anything—that I—"

Trueman Tisdale, still calm, possessed, lighted his loaded pipe as he answered.

"No, not directly, but—" There was just the dramatic pause that goes for effectiveness, as he veered off to another topic. "It would be just as well for you, Sanderson, if you didn't come to town quite so often—"

"You wouldn't say that, True Tisdale, unless you had a pretty good reason. Now, what is it?" with all his bluster returned, in his idea from the calmness of True Tisdale that the other was not especially interested. "Do you mean—"

Martha Tisdale's husband shook the hot ash from the pipe from which he had taken but a few puffs. He put it in his pocket. Then he took one step toward the man he had stopped in the street, and his eyes looked levelly into the shifting ones of Nate Sanderson.

"What are you thinking it might be?" he asked, his voice low and clear. "I seem to remember," he went on, "that there's a passage in the Bible which says something about coveting what belongs to others. Do you recall it, Sanderson?"

Sanderson's sneer was less covert.

"Maybe so," he answered, with an attempt at his old nonchalance. "Haven't read up much in it lately, but—"

"Might be well to keep that passage in mind, Sanderson," said Trueman Tisdale, his gaze never faltering from the other. "Pretty good advice, that." And then, as though he knew that his meaning had

sunk fully in, his mood changed in a moment. His face became less grim, and his eyes tilted skyward. "Fairish kind of weather we're having," he observed. "When do you sail?" His gaze came back to rest on the mate's face.

Sullenly that person allowed himself to answer.

"Loading at Boston, now; reckon we'll sail in a day or two."

"So soon?" Trueman Tisdale's smile was bland. "Then you'll have to go back to-day, won't you?" There was a quality of warning in the lightship captain's voice which, despite his smile, could not fail to impress. Obviously the packet mate was disturbed. His eyes attempted to break away from Trueman Tisdale's steady gaze.

"Yes—" he faltered. "I—I'll be going back to-day."

Tisdale smiled his slow, engaging smile.

"Long trip?" he asked.

"New Orleans."

"Don't think I'd like that, exactly. Keeps one away too long."

Nate Sanderson had had enough. He turned to swing off toward the dock, but with little of the assurance with which he had begun his journey.

"Every man to his liking," he flung back. "I'd go crazy on a lightship."

Trueman Tisdale's smile was satisfied as he watched the other man on his way. Then he turned and went slowly toward the club. It was in his mind to see Captain Hen and Captain Caleb before

he should go home to Martha, and anyway, it was early yet, and Martha would probably not be up for a time.

But Martha Tisdale was up. She had not rested easily during her night at Mrs. Lou Barzum's with Dorothy Merrill, and had left after an early breakfast. At first she had meant to go directly home, but as she had thought of Ma Tisdale and what she might expect from that shrewish relative, her heart had failed her. She would put off the meeting as long as possible. It occurred to her that she might go to the post office for the early mail, and by so doing would not be so likely to encounter Mehitable or any others who were doing their best to make life miserable for her.

To her discomfort, Mehitable was before her. On her entrance into the low little room with its metal letter boxes lining one side of the wall, behind which the postmaster was already roaming about with an air of keeping busy, and its high desk attached to another wall, the first thing she saw was the elderly spinster deep in conversation with Ozra Hemingway, and a group of her intimates. At first Martha did not catch what they were saying. But when she saw them turn their backs in obvious meaning at her timorous greeting, she went with high held head and burning cheeks to her own box and busied herself with opening it. Mehitable's voice came distinctly to her.

"And when a woman's husband comes ashore in the morning," she was saying pointedly, "and never goes

near his home, but just hits it up for the Neptune Club, why then I say—"

It was enough. It was too much. Martha Tisdale's cheeks tingled. What did Mehitable mean? Was Trueman ashore, and she did not know it? Then it must be the truth, what she had guessed—that Trueman did not want to see her, did not care—did not even care what the people of Bayport were saying. She must find out for herself whether Mehitable Sands was speaking truthfully when she said that Trueman Tisdale was ashore. Without another glance in the direction of the eager gossips, she turned and fled to the street.

At the door she almost ran over Mrs. Lem Tooker and her gangling daughter, Lizzie, but she did not fail to note how they turned their heads aside and seemed not to hear her murmured words of apology. So that was it? That was how they meant to treat her—these people of Bayport to whom she had never done any harm! Oh, it was unbearable! She must find Trueman; *must* make him do something about it—

To Martha Tisdale it seemed that the whole town had got up earlier than usual in order to discuss her and to make things as unhappy as possible. She was more than confirmed in this when, as she rushed into the Neptune Club, intent on finding her husband and putting her plea to him once more to come home to her and protect her, a plea she was wildly making up her mind would be her last. The first thing she heard was the strident tones of Ma Tisdale's voice,

raised, as usual, in denunciation of her step-daughter.

"What right have you to tell me what I shall say?" Ma Tisdale was demanding, and there was a harshness to her voice and a hint of fight to come in her attitude that Martha was quick to remark. "Here I am telling you—"

Trueman's soothing tones came to Martha's ears, but what he said she did not hear. She was wildly, blindingly angry, resentful of the attitude of her step-mother and other Bayporters who had so gratuitously sent her to Coventry, and so intent on believing only evil of her when her own conscience told her she had done no wrong, unless she could accept the single prick that came with the knowledge that she had attended a dance the night before without Trueman's knowledge. But she intended to tell him.

Ma Tisdale burst out furiously.

"I'll say that and a whole lot more before I'm through, True Tisdale! I'll tell them what she is and what she's done—out all night last night, and she's—"

Like a young whirlwind, eyes flashing and lips tense with the excitement of defending herself, Martha Tisdale burst upon her step-mother-in-law and her husband into the center of the room where they were holding their conference alone. Not even the regulars had appeared as yet, but somehow it had come to Ma Tisdale's ears that Trueman had gone to the club, and she did not wait for Martha to forestall her in what she had to say. Tense in every muscle, her hands clenched till the nails bit into the

flesh, the young wife faced her traducer. Her voice was sibilant as she fairly hissed: "Don't say it! Don't!"

"Phaugh!" said Ma Tisdale, as she turned away. "You're a fine one to tell me what I can or can't say, ain't you—you, who are nuthin' but—"

"Don't say it!" repeated Martha Tisdale, and the words came through clenched teeth. Her eyes went to her husband and there was an appeal in her sob as she went on: "Oh, I haven't done anything—I haven't! What can she tell you, or anybody else but lies! Lies!" Her hands went out to Trueman, and in a moment, her head was buried on his breast. "Oh, True! Trueman!" she sobbed.

How much Trueman Tisdale would have given at that moment had his nature not been the repressed one it was, he alone knew. What would he have given to be able to take that sobbing little creature to his heart, to soothe her, to tell her that nothing mattered save that they loved each other! But he could not. Something inside of him that would have made this possible still held him back—the bands were still unbroken. Only his hand went up to smooth the girl's dark hair as she sobbed. Oh, she thought, if he would only make this the end of it all—would only tell Ma Tisdale that she and all the others must leave her alone. But there was no hint of passion or that he considered the matter seriously as he merely patted his wife's shoulder, and asked: "There, there, now, Martha, what does all the trouble seem to be about?"

Before she could answer, though, Ma Tisdale had forestalled her, Ma Tisdale, who was not handicapped by sobbing or a need to gather her forces for a fresh attack.

"I'll tell you what it is all about!" she broke in hastily, and with a voice of acidity. "Why, this—this wife of yours she wan't home all night last night, and Nate Sanderson—"

Trueman's voice was calm as he nodded in answer.

"I know—" he said. "She spent the night with Miss Merrill—met young Billings with Captain Hen's boat and he told me how they'd been over to the Point, and—"

A great sigh left Martha Tisdale's breast. Then Trueman already knew; he didn't object. She lifted her head from his shoulder to face Ma Tisdale.

"You see? You see?" She exclaimed eagerly. "There was nothing wrong with it—"

Ma Tisdale sniffed as she viciously pulled a chair toward her and dropped into it, as though to settle herself for an argument.

"How does anybuddy know there wan't?" she demanded.

"Well, now, Ma, I wouldn't just exactly say that—" It was Trueman's sole remonstrance, but at its mildness Martha flared, as she whirled on Ma Tisdale.

"How can you say such things—how can you think such things!" She hurled out in her outrage. "How dare you—"

Trueman Tisdale, little as had been his experience

with women, was nonplused, as helpless as a child trying to find out the reason for electricity. He put out a hand toward Martha.

"Now, now, Martha," he said hesitatingly, "you just leave her to me—I'll attend to things—"

But Ma Tisdale was on her feet in a moment. The situation did not call for sitting calmly.

"You're a fool, Trueman Tisdale!" she hissed. "A fool—with his eyes closed!"

"Maybe; maybe!" Trueman nodded, and there was a suspicion of a smile about his lips. Even yet Trueman Tisdale could not seem to take this matter, this tempest in a teapot, as he mentally characterized it, seriously. "But I'll risk it," he added slowly.

Ma Tisdale threw out both her hands in an angry gesture.

"Oh! oh!" she shrieked. "I'm done with you—both of you—you standin' up for her—" The enmity in the last word made itself felt as a living thing. For a moment, Martha seemed about to speak, but at a gesture from her husband was silent, even though there was hurt wonderment in her eyes that Trueman could allow even Ma Tisdale to go so far. He could not, however, stem the flood of Ma Tisdale's tirade.

"Oh! oh!" she repeated furiously. "Now I'm more sartin than ever that I'm right—no good will come of it, I'm tellin' you— No good will come of it."

With a last shaft of enmity from her spectacled eyes toward Martha, she flounced toward the door

and out. Behind her the door banged angrily. Just for a moment, Martha Tisdale stood looking at the still quivering door. Then it was with outflung hands that she turned to her husband as she heartbrokenly cried: "Oh, Trueman, Trueman! I hate them! I hate them all!"

"That won't help none." Trueman had the manner of placating a child, an attitude that he had no reason for knowing was so infuriating to the wife, who believed he did not care enough even to protect her.

"I can't help it!" she said, doggedly. "I do!"

"I'd try to help it if I was you," he remonstrated, but Martha was not listening. All the pent-up passion of the last few days was loosening within her. Blindly she started to pace the floor.

"Oh, why do they keep driving me and driving me when I'm doing no wrong?" she burst out passionately and as though addressing her query to another than Trueman. She scarcely heard his soft reply.

"Some people seem to be that way, Martha."

"It isn't fair! It isn't fair!"

She stopped suddenly to confront her husband who had stood awkwardly in his same position throughout the painful scene. She scarcely heard his murmured: "I know, Martha, I know—" She rushed on.

"Oh, Trueman, I'm asking you—I've asked you so many times before—please—*please* give up the lightship—be with me! I'll go anywhere—do any-

thing—work my fingers to the bone—to be away from all this—"

Trueman Tisdale shook his head sadly.

"No, girl," he said slowly. "It wouldn't do—We've got to stick it out here—"

"Please—*please,* Trueman," there was a break in his wife's voice in her pleading, "come ashore, won't you? Be with me—help me!"

Once again Trueman Tisdale experienced the smothering sensation he had come to know so well—the feeling of helplessness at his lack of words when he wanted to open his heart to his wife, and could not. She must believe him! Have faith in him! What had he ever done that she should not? And surely she could see, must know, without any words from him, that his faith in her was absolute. He knew it must be hard for the girl, but he felt sure that when he had got rid of Ma Tisdale, as he intended doing, and the clatterers had said all they had to say, that everything would be all right. Then Martha could look back on the experiences she believed so hard to-day and laugh at them.

Trueman Tisdale was not a quitter. He did not want his wife to be one; he could not encourage her in any such notion. Slowly he shook his head.

"Some day, Martha—some day," he told her. "But I can't come now—"

She plucked at his sleeve. "But to-day you will, won't you, Trueman?" she begged. "Oh, say you will—just for to-day! Oh, I want you so—need you. Say you will—please!"

But there was no response from the man whose sleeve she clutched. Again Trueman's head only shook. For a moment he thought to tell her why he could not stay ashore to-day—of Avery—everything. But his lips shut tightly when it surged over him that his wife must believe him without explanations. Some day he would tell Martha why he had not heeded her pleadings to-day. But, now—now, she must believe in him, as he did in her—without question.

"Not to-day, Martha," he said. "There are reasons, but—well, we'll talk it all over some time." He seemed so little interested to the girl who could not look deep into his heart to know the driving impulses that made him seem to her warm emotional nature not only hard, but uncaring. Her hand dropped from his sleeve as she turned away listlessly.

"There's nothing to talk over," she told him, and there was a touch of bitterness in her voice as she added: "I'm only asking for what I have a right—the protection a husband should give a wife. There can't be any question in your mind—nothing to talk over, to discuss—you just will—or you won't—"

It was as though years had suddenly been added to her buoyant youth that she turned and slumped toward the door. She was so tired—so tired! She scarcely heard his surprised: "Going?" as she opened the door and slipped through. She must get outside. Must have a chance to think things over for herself. There was so much to think of—so much to do in some way.

Once again Trueman had shown he did not care for her. Her mental vision could not show her that at the very moment of her departure, the man whom she thought had failed her, was tenderly thinking of her as he might have of a hurt child, telling himself how it would all be right for her when he gave up his post the next week and came ashore for good. But he had not been able to tell her of these things. There was the New England repression—there were the effects of the long, long hours with only the wideness of the sea for companionship—the sea that listened while a man thought and thought—and never answered back.

Before his more leisurely progress had brought him to the door through which his wife had gone, Trueman Tisdale heard the voice that sung out from outside the club rooms.

"Look out for dem steps, Mis' Martha. De debbil's in 'em an' makes hit easy to slip an' fall."

Trueman's face wore a half smile as he reached the doorway to the street. Almost to the corner was Martha, dashing along madly as though her business were in a great rush. After her looked the fish peddler, Shiner, whose admonition about the steps Trueman had heard, and the old negro's two shining rows of teeth which showed when he turned to greet the lightship captain belied the appearance of age of his half bald, grizzled pate, which shone in the morning sunlight—a pate from which he had removed the battered old hat that was as much of a fixture in

Bayport and as familiar as the iron fountain in the public square.

Shiner looked up across the cart of fish he pushed and stopped while the moisture from his wares wet the dust of the street in front of the club and sent up an aroma to which fishing Bayport was accustomed.

"Mornin', Trueman," he called with the assurance of a character that was as fixed as the winding dirt streets of Bayport. "Seems like Mis' Martha was sho' in sum hurry, yassah!"

Trueman smiled. "We all get that way sometimes," he observed.

"Yassah," Shiner's bald head nodded emphasis. "I dun noticed dat. But," and his keen old eyes sought Trueman's in a knowing way that was disconcerting, "den dere's times when we'all's powerful slow. Seems lak dey's times when a man kin say more nothin' dan anythin', and dey's times words count, Trueman, words count. Sellin' fish an' hearin' things tells a man a lot 'bout old horse human nature dey never knew before—yassah."

For a moment Trueman Tisdale's eyes held on the old negro whose enigmatical words told him the peddler meant more than his mere words conveyed. But he would not question him. Something rose up in him to resent everything. If the whole town was talking—if even this old peddler knew so much about his, Trueman's, affairs, then things had come to a fine pass. He would not stand it—he would change

matters and soon— Abruptly he leapt down the three remaining steps.

"Well, I'm in something of a hurry myself, Shiner," he said. "Got to be getting back to the lightship—time's up."

As he swung down the street, he did not look back to see the sad wagging of the old peddler's head as he lifted the handles of his cart and paddled his way on in the opposite direction.

"Humph!" observed the old philosopher as he shoved a wriggling speckled haddock back into the cart from which it threatened to escape. "Trubble! Trubble! Shiner! Ole Man Trubble's tryin' to do sumthin' here." He shuffled on a few feet further. "Trubble!" he mused, but then into his old eyes there came a flash of light. "But hain't it allus de same. Dey kain't be no laffin' in dis worl' without some weepin'—weepin'—"

CHAPTER XIV

"NO, sir, I 'low th' *Nancy Ann* hain't much like th' clippers I onc't used ter put to sea in, nor yet like any whaler, but when she gits agoin' why they hain't no gas boat in these waters kin beat her none—even if she do make a big to-do and noise like a dozen engines bust loose ter onc't."

Captain Hen Berry was discoursing on the merits of the one thing that still kept him in touch with the sea—his grimy motor boat that was a familiar sight to Bayporters.

Jack Billings, who had dropped down to the wharf to see that the old man was satisfied with the condition in which he had returned it, listened and nodded assent. Captain Hen patted the engine as if it were a living thing. The young man from the city smiled sympathetically.

"Those must have been great days—those days of whaling," he offered. "Always thought I would have liked to have lived then and gone to sea. There was romance—"

"Wal, I 'low so." Captain Hen's head nodded in its turn. "An' a whole lot of trouble, too. Never knew when a man went out whether he was comin' back or not—many a woman's waited and he never come—ye kin see where they used to watch," his

hand swept in a wide gesture toward the houses that lay beyond the wharf with its clutter of casks, rigging, anchors, lumber, and spars, "—them's Widow's Walks I was a-tellin' ye and Miss Merrill 'bout t'other day. No, sir, there war no tellin'—they was so many things could happen to a man. They didn't shoot no whales with a harpoon from steamers like they do to-day. Whalin' them days was a two-fisted job fer th' small crew that went out after the big fellers. Sometimes a man fell overboard, too; then agin they'd be hit by whales, cut with irons or drownded."

The old sailor got up from the seat of his motor boat and stretched himself. He seemed little interested in his memories, but anyone who knew him could have told by the twinkle of his eyes how much he was enjoying the interest which his auditor displayed.

"But it was romantic, after all," remarked Billings, "and there was just as much fun as there was trouble, wasn't there?"

" 'Low there was," mused Captain Hen as he stepped out on the wharf with its strong sea smell of fish and paraphernalia. Another twinkle came into his eyes. "Yes, sir," he repeated, "I 'low there was—even when some of 'em come home dead. Reminds me of the tale I heered once back in th' days when th' Neptune Club was young. They was a lot of fellers there a-yarnin', and settin' alongside was a Portugee that wasn't sayin' much, but a-listenin'. Finally, this here Portugee thought hit

time for him to say somethin'. He turned 'round to Captain Joe Billings, what was braggin' about his ship. Says this Portugee: 'They's somethin' our ship does yer ship never thought o' doin'. We brings our bodies home when one of us dies at sea. Matey die from bite in neck by whale. We put him in a box and fill de box with rum. You no save man dat way. And Cap'n he watch box all time, but every time Cap'n he come on watch dat box had to be filled up agin. Dat dead man jest soaked hit up every time. You no soak dead man dat way.' "

Jack Billings' appreciative laugh was halted half way by the sound of running feet and a hail in a feminine voice—a voice that held a sob. Captain Hen and Jack sprang forward, as Martha Tisdale came flying down the narrow cobble-paved street. That something most disturbing had happened was evident from the distress in her eyes and the half hysterical voice as she called:

"Oh, Captain Hen! Have you seen Trueman? Oh, I've got to see him—at once! Oh, I won't stand it! I can't!"

Captain Hen came toward the girl and took her by the shoulders as he turned her to look into her eyes.

"What's th' matter, Martha?" he asked, tenderly concerned. "Tell me what has happened."

But almost beside herself, the girl could only sob. It was through her broken sentences that she at last made herself understood.

"And there they stood laughing at me," she sob-

bed, "or turning their backs as I passed—and when I stopped for a minute his step-mother flung it in my face, and—it's a lie! A lie!" she wailed. "Oh, it is unbearable!"

On the nicotine-perfumed blue jersey jacket of Captain Hen the young wife sobbed out her troubles. And though he admitted women had been an inexplicable matter to him through his life, and some of them—take Mehitable Sands, for instance—"a 'tarnal nuisance," yet Captain Hen seemed to understand. There was reassurance and sympathy in the gnarled old hand that gently patted her shoulder while over it he looked toward the town with such black looks that could any of those Bayport women of whom he was thinking seen him, they would have known that a storm was brewing fast.

With a quick gesture, Martha lifted her head and looked eagerly about her.

"Oh, you do know where he is, Captain Hen?" she asked again. "They told me he had come down to the wharf when I went back to the club for him. Oh, he must have known why I left him in such a hurry, and that I didn't mean anything—" Her voice trailed off pitifully.

The old captain shook his head. No, he hadn't seen Trueman.

"But there, now, Martha," he soothed. "Don't ye go a-mindin' what them wimmin says. You jest wait. Everythin' will work out all right. Always clears after a storm."

Martha, however, was not to be soothed.

"Oh, I want him so, Captain Hen," she quivered. "I—I need him so—"

Hesitantly Jack Billings spoke up.

"I think—I—er," he offered, "well, I'm sure I saw his dory making its way out to the lightship as I was coming down here—"

"Gone!" Martha Tisdale's voice broke again. "And without a word to me—oh, it can't be!"

Captain Hen put her gently from him. Over his rubicund old face there flashed a look of determination, and one hand pulled wildly at his fringe. He turned to his boat.

"If ye want him that bad, Martha girl," he said, "then I 'low I kin git him for ye."

He had given the engine a turn when Billings broke in.

"But do you think—er—don't you suppose he—" he began, but Captain Hen cut him short.

"No matter what he thinks," he said stubbornly. "He's been doin' too much thinkin' an' not enough doin' fer come some time. And," and there was the stubborn set to his jaw that other men in other sailor days had known so well, "I 'low I hain't afered to tell no man the time of day jest so long as I'm able ter sit up and eat breakfast."

"Then I'm with you, as far as the Point, anyway," Jack Billings said, as he loosened the rope of the motor boat. Then, to Martha: "Don't you think you'd better come with us, as far as the cove—you can drop over and see Dorothy—"

Martha Tisdale shook her head. She sat down

on an upended cask and clasped her hands about her knees while she gazed off down the river toward the ocean in the direction of the lightship.

"No," she answered listlessly. "I'm going to stay here—I'm going to wait."

As the little boat put-putted down the river, steered by the hands of Captain Hen Berry, she gazed down after it, while a long-drawn sigh that shook her frame issued from her lips. To the river lapping against the piles she whispered: "Oh, how could he! Why doesn't he understand! Why doesn't he care! And I needed him so!"

So intent was she on her own bitter thoughts that she did not hear the footfalls back of her or know that she was not alone until she looked up, startled, to see Nate Sanderson standing beside her, a smile lighting his face.

"Well," he grinned, "this is a pleasant surprise. About pretty early after your late night, aren't you? What's up? Going fishing?"

Martha shook her head disinterestedly.

"No," she told him. "I just came down here to see Trueman, and—he's gone." There was a world of discouragement in her voice, but she looked up quickly as she heard the tones of Nate Sanderson's. It was deploring, sympathetic, understanding.

"Yes, I know," he nodded, "I—I saw him, and—"

"What did he say?" She was eager.

But Sanderson seemed to avoid a direct answer. He seemed reluctant to say what he had in mind, and

his tones were all of sympathy. Suddenly, as though his mind had been made up to a painful duty, he burst out.

"Yes, I saw him," he declared, "and—well, Martha, I know he dislikes me, but I—I tried to help him—and to help you—"

"Tell me," she demanded, and she rose quickly from her seat, "is he—is he coming back?"

Again Sanderson avoided the answer direct.

"I tried to tell him about you—about how hard they are making it for you—"

"Yes, yes—and he—he said—"

Good actor in his own cause that he was, Nate Sanderson was able to hide the smile of triumph in his eyes as he answered dolefully: "Why, he—he turned from me. But you mustn't mind it, Martha. He doesn't—"

In a stride Martha Tisdale stood in front of him, and her voice was tense as she demanded: "Tell me the truth, Nate Sanderson. I want to know everything. . . . What did Trueman say?"

"It wasn't so much what he said," he went on, hypocritically keeping up his sympathetic manner, "Oh, please, Martha, don't make me tell you—"

"What did he say? I must know." There was a hard, metallic ring to the girl's voice as her hands clenched so tightly that the knuckles showed white under the browned skin. For just a moment the man seemed to be considering.

"Well," he burst out suddenly, "I—I hate to tell you, Martha—but if you must know—why, well, he

said that what people say won't hurt you any, and—and—he—he said he'd see you later."

The sob that broke from the young wife's breast was almost a groan. She turned to look longingly down the river. Then she spoke brokenly.

"He—could—say—that—"

"I tried, Martha, I tried." She was hardly conscious of what Nate was saying, but his words, nevertheless, sank in. "I tried, but I couldn't make him listen. You know how he felt—what he's been thinking about me—"

He reached for one of the girl's hands to offer his sympathy, but she pulled it away as she stood gazing seaward. He knew he could afford to wait. This was the one opportunity for which he had been looking. It was his best play, this play of sympathy. And the sympathy in his voice was unmistakable as he broke out: "And I—I have had to stand by and listen—to their damned lies, for I haven't the right to protect you—"

Too dazed to pay much heed to the man before her, Martha's eyes were still on the river and the blue ocean in the distance as she whispered, half mechanically: "How—could—he—how could he—go away—and leave me—now. At this time—when I need him most?" She did not even seem to know that Sanderson had at last possessed himself of one of her hands. She let it lay limply in his fervent grasp. It was good to be understood—to have someone who sympathized. Suddenly, something seemed to break. From her limp attitude she

brought herself up with a jerk, and her eyes flashed as she turned them on Sanderson.

"Nate," she shot out, "you have told me you would help me if the time ever came that I needed you—"

She stopped him with uplifted hand as he started to reply.

"That time has come. You've told me you would help me find my father—and I have got to find him. I need him; probably he needs me, too. And he at least will protect me, and he has the right. No, no, let me think a moment," as her hands pressed over her eyes. "He—he—said it didn't matter—he's gone back out there—leaving me—"

The hands came down from her eyes and she faced Sanderson determinedly. "Yes, Nate, I will accept your offer. I will let you help me—for I'm going to my father—who cares!"

It was well for Martha Tisdale's peace of mind that she did not see the flash of triumph that lighted Nate Sanderson's black eyes as he turned to humbly follow her from the wharf.

A perfectly good pair of suspenders was ruined forever for Ozra Hemingway as a result of what he saw just two hours later as he lounged behind the baggage truck at the Bayport railroad station. Ozra was usually lounging on that platform about that time, for no one ever knew just what might or might not happen at train time, and besides, it was at a time of day when there was little likelihood of anything

going on at the post office, for the women were usually occupied with the dinner getting; nor at the Club, either, for that matter, for the men folks were pretty well interested in their stomachs at the same time, also. Therefore, it was left for Ozra Hemingway to see the noon train through in lonesome solitude, though he had company for any other trains of the day.

The scarcity of people about the station at noon, too, may have had something to do with what Ozra Hemingway saw—that something that made him snap his suspenders until one clasp came neatly off and flew straight across the cobbled street where he let it lay to be hunted another time. There was something for Ozra Hemingway more important to do than hunt for suspender buttons. So his hand clutched wildly for the accustomed elastic, hardly minding that it was not there—any more than that for once he was compelled to trust to the trustworthiness of a belt to hold up his breeches, which hung loosely from his skinny hips and legs. In spite of all their leanness, though, those legs could still make time and they broke all records as their owner half hobbled, half sprinted up the street. He was a little uncertain just where he was going.

The one thing of which he was certain was that he was in a hurry. There hadn't been anything so interesting for the town gossip to tell for a long time; and it was certain that he alone knew it.

It would be useless to go to the post office, he knew; besides, the club was nearer. He turned down

the main street and brought up breathlessly in front of the old West Indy warehouse which not only today housed the Neptune Club, but housed its more important Auxiliary.

Captain Caleb Fish, seated with feet propped up on the dismantled stove, was at peace with the world. He was alone, and was contemplating. His gaze roved about the room and held for a few moments on the wall decorations—huge, angry-looking whale teeth six or seven inches in length; then to rove on to a great steering oar that reached almost across the room. His thoughts were far away from Bayport and its doings of the day.

He glanced up with a smile as Ozra Hemingway rushed into the room, laboring, Captain Caleb could see, under some unusual excitement. But was it unusual for Ozra, Captain Caleb thought, as only his eyes shifted toward the newcomer. Ozra was always excited about something or other. He called out cheerily.

"Come 'longside, Ozra. I've had a half-hour's peace and quiet 'board ship without a woman in sight, and I kin even stand you."

"I hain't wantin' to hear ye," sniffed the former sea cook. "Got too much on my mind. Ye seen True Tisdale, or know whether he's gone back to his lightship?"

The tremor in the wizened man's voice, mingled with a sort of exultation, was enough for Captain Caleb, who understood him. Ozra Hemingway undoubtedly knew something he must tell or "bust his

anchor chains," as the big captain mentally phrased it. He took his feet down from the stove and turned toward the sea cook.

"What's botherin' ye now, Oz?" he demanded.

But the New England Uriah Heep was enjoying himself too hugely. He had no mind to give his news too suddenly.

" 'Tain't nuthin' much," he muttered. "Good riddance—no, 'tain't nuthin'—" he cackled disagreeably.

"Wal," drawled Captain Caleb, "yer makin' a heap of fuss 'bout it." But as he made to lift his feet to the stove again to resume his meditation, Ozra decided he had waited long enough for his dramatic explosion. He spoke in a bored sort of manner, as of one who was accustomed to saying, "I told you so."

"Nuthin' much," he continued, " 'cept that I jest seen Martha Tisdale and that Nate Sanderson goin' away together on the noon train, and she wouldn't look at me, and—"

Ozra Hemingway had no cause to doubt the effectiveness of his bomb. In a bound which would have done credit to a younger and lighter man, Captain Caleb was on his feet and had the small man by the slack of his shirt which he could grasp more easily because of the missing suspender.

"Oz Hemingway," he boomed, his brows black, "By godfrey, ef ye're lyin' to me, I'll choke ye—"

Struggling, half choking as it was, Ozra Hemingway showed his fright as he sought to break away.

"Let me be, Caleb Fish!" he squealed. "Let me be! I'm tellin' th' truth—I saw Nate, too, and he spoke ter me, and," fumbling in his side pocket with one hand while he tried to hold off the big captain with the other, he brought forth a crumpled note, "he give me this ter give True Tisdale. It's in her writin'—"

Dazedly Captain Caleb took the note from Hemingway's hand; dazedly he recognized the writing. He sat down hard in his recently abandoned chair as his clasp relaxed from the news-bearer's garments.

"She couldn't," he muttered. "She jest couldn't! Oh, Lord!"

"I told ye she warn't no good—" began Oz when he got his breath along with his assurance, but the savage shout of Captain Caleb silenced him.

"Keep yer mouth shut, damn ye!" he shouted. "Wonder where True is—"

But as if in answer to his question, the door opened with a bang and the man in question came hurriedly in, trailed by Captain Hen Berry. His was a look of surprise as he saw the woebegone countenance of his old friend, and noted the triumphant gleam in the small eyes of the man who was official trouble-bearer to the town. But Captain Caleb did not speak. Trueman Tisdale looked about him anxiously.

"Thought we'd find Martha here, likely," he addressed Captain Caleb. "Can't find her any place else in town. You seen her?"

For just the moment big Captain Caleb hesitated.

Trueman Tisdale sensed something wrong. He came closer.

"Can't you answer me?" he demanded. "What's happened? Martha—where is she?"

With the bowed head of a judge rendering a death sentence, Captain Caleb, without rising, extended the letter he still clutched in his hand. His eyes were turned away from Tisdale who looked at it questioningly for a moment, turning it over and over before he broke it and read.

For another moment, the three men, two of them his friends of a lifetime, another who joyed in the misery he might bring and knew he had brought, watched him. They saw him stand taut. They saw the slow movement of his shoulders before they sagged brokenly. And then, still without turning that they might see his face, they watched him walk toward the windows, slowly, painfully as a man stricken, while the letter crumpled in his hand.

As he stood there looking out of the window, staring into space, staring at the river and the familiar sights he did not see, it was Captain Caleb who made the first move. With the quietness he might have observed were he in a house of mourning, he stood up from his chair and tiptoed across to the man at the window. But he could not hear the whispered words of that man; he could not read his thoughts.

Trueman Tisdale's unseeing eyes were gazing down the river toward the familiar ocean, where he knew was the familiar lightship at anchor. He was

remembering how happy he had been out there only the night before as he had made his new resolutions. Now—now— "And I'd come to tell her I'd stay ashore," he was telling himself over and over. He flinched the slightest bit at the gentle touch of Captain Caleb's big hand on his shoulder. His eyes turned to see him.

"Trueman—I—I'm sorry," said Captain Caleb futilely.

Over on his seat on the edge of a table Ozra Hemingway snorted, a blatant sound in the tenseness. One motion Captain Hen made of it. Ozra Hemingway was picked up by the nape of the neck and pointed toward the door. Captain Hen indicated the way.

"You get t' hell outer here!" he ordered shrilly.

But Trueman, unhearing, turned from the window from which he had been staring. Like an old man from whom all life had gone, he sagged toward the same door. He tried to speak matter-of-factly.

"Got to be getting back to the lightship," he informed them, and unprotestingly they let him go, those two old men who stared into each other's eyes and knew not what to do.

Outside, Trueman Tisdale had gone past a dozen houses or more, with small notion of whether his course was taking him toward the wharf or not, when the sound of flying footsteps came to ears that little heeded. But he stopped when he felt the tight grip on his arm that Dorothy Merrill gave him, her

cheeks blazing with excitement, her hat awry, and a visible anger in her usually mild eyes.

"She—she's gone!" breathed Dorothy Merrill breathlessly, "and oh, I told her—I wanted to tell you—"

Trueman Tisdale nodded dully. "Yes, I 'low so," he said, reverting to the colloquialism of his childhood.

"But you're going after her—right away?" breathed the girl who had been his wife's friend, excitedly. "You must—you—"

Slowly Trueman Tisdale shook his head. "I don't 'low she'll want me to," he said. "Besides, I don't know where she's gone—"

But Dorothy Merrill shook with anger.

"You! You, her husband! Who left her to bear the slandering tongues of this old town—and now you let her go—Well, I'll tell you something, Mr. Trueman Tisdale, if you don't know where she is, I do—see?" and she held up a note as crumpled as the one the lightship captain still held in his hand.

"But there's something more I'm not going to tell you, if you don't know—until you can come to your senses! Oh, why—why"—and she flung out her arms to address the universe—"why are men so—so—so BLIND!"

She flung off down the street at a pace that took her around the corner from the man's sight, before he could bring his muddled mind to answer her. He stood stock still in the street, never heeding that he was in front of the Sands home where Mehitable,

putting out wet clothes on the little platform on the roof of her house—the platform that had once been the Widow's Walk—was hanging over the railing and watching him with cat-like eyes.

His hand opened and he spread out the crumpled note. That girl—that Dorothy Merrill—was not a bad sort to stand up for Martha so, but she did not know. She had not read what he had read. His eyes, dimmed a little, glanced over hastily written lines.

"—so, if he doesn't want me any more, or don't need me, I'm going to the one other man in the world who does care, and—"

If Dorothy Merrill had not known everything, neither did Martha Tisdale's husband, as he stared out past the old-fashioned houses to the shimmer of water beyond and thought—thought of what she had written. He did not know what his young wife had meant when she had written that sentence.

CHAPTER XV

TRUEMAN TISDALE was a disappointment to his friends and critics. Enemies he could not be said to have unless were taken into account those disgruntled ones, who for personal, or other reasons, had disapproved of his marriage. Now all were united in disapproving the attitude assumed by the lightship captain. Two weeks had passed since the town had been set agog by the report that Martha Tisdale had gone away with Nate Sanderson, and Trueman Tisdale had done—just nothing. Perhaps he was quieter than usual, if that were possible. Only the men of his crew knew anything about the sleepless nights he spent roaming the decks of the lightship and staring out to sea, as though he could glean a solution of his problems from its black mysterious depths.

Seldom did he come into Bayport, and then only for a look-in at the Neptune Club, where, his instinct told him, he still had true friends—though, manlike, and sailorlike, they would keep their opinions to themselves. They, too, like the feminine element of the small seaport town, had looked in vain for some kind of violent tragic action following Trueman Tisdale's wife's disappearance. And they were at a loss to make him out when nothing happened. For once

in their lives they were willing to agree with the consensus of opinion that Trueman should "keelhaul that damned skunk of a Sanderson." But, unlike him, their views were sincere, and not brought about by disappointment at no dramatic happenings.

It was Captain Lem, who, in the interval, between a checker game, of setting up his black men, expressed the club's opinion in a nutshell when he muttered, shaking his head: "Can't figger True out. Them still, blue-eyed fellers ain't gen'lly safe to crowd with too big a cargo of wrongs. They don't sink. They blow up. But True, he's luggin' his all a-standin', why don't he ra're, or fight, or bust?"

Captain Hen, watching the game from his favorite vantage point with tip-tilted chair beside the stove, shook his head sadly as he clawed at his whiskers.

"Kain't say," he remarked oracularly. "Mebbe he's jest waitin' the tide."

Within homes, where men expressed their opinion more freely than without, it was the general opinion that Trueman Tisdale was proving a pretty poor specimen to "let a swab like Nate Sanderson pirate his ship without liftin' a finger," but the men of the town took rather good precaution to whom this was said.

It was on one of those rare visits of Trueman Tisdale's to the Neptune Club that there came to one of them the flash of the true feelings of Martha's husband. Direct from the wharf he had come and had dropped into his accustomed chair beside the

window to resume his occupation of sea-gazing. Also, as usual, he seemed to take little note of his companions, though the inclemency of the weather—summer was fast waning, and the scutter of clouds and occasional flurries of wind from the southeast were signs that the sweet calm of the summer days was about past—had urged most of the older element into the club.

Captain Caleb shook the ash out of his pipe and sat gazing at the back of Trueman Tisdale, with all the fervor with which the young man was scanning the river that led down to the sea. Captain Caleb undoubtedly had something on his mind. But he was uncertain whether to keep it to himself or not. Twice he shifted in his seat before he found courage to do as he wished. He squared his shoulders as he rose, walked across the room and dropped into the chair beside Trueman Tisdale—a chair that of recent date had been more often vacant than not. His uneasiness did not leave him even during his perfunctory remarks about the weather. Then with a sudden quick movement he leaned forward and laid his hand sympathetically on Trueman's shoulder. His eyes moved surreptitiously about the room to be sure what he was going to say would not be overheard.

"True," he whispered hoarsely, but in a voice that only his companion could hear. "True, they're talkin'—talkin' like HELL! They're talkin' gall and blue vitr'ol. As a friend, True, don't ye go gittin' mad ef I say yer friends have been kinda

lookin' for ye to do somethin'. Ain't ye goin' ter make no move at all? I want ter be able to shut 'em up—dod rat 'em!"

There was the ring of the sincerity of real friendship in the big captain's voice, as he plead with the man he had known as boy and man, whose father had been friend before him. But he might have been talking to the chair in which Trueman sat for all the response he had for the moment. No muscle moved, no flicker of interest, as the man continued his seaward gaze. A whole two minutes before he spoke, and then when he did, it was in even, controlled tones, and with the level gaze of the man who knows his own business and intends to abide by his own counsel.

"Captain Caleb," he said deliberately, "you mean well—better than most I could name. But if you want to do me a real friendly turn, tell them to leave me alone—me and everything to do with me. I go my way, let them go theirs—and see that the ways don't cross.

"Say, Captain," and his tone changed as suddenly as his mood. He seemed to have said all he wished and to have completely dismissed the matter of his own affairs, with a finality he wished his friend to understand. "What ship do you make that out to be off Eastern Point?"

The little encounter, however, had not gone unnoticed by other members of the club, gathered in another corner. Ozra Hemingway bristled like a hen that had had a wetting. He felt it his bounden

duty to say something in the crisis, for hitherto he had been shut up at every opportunity to speak his mind to Martha's husband. He had risen and taken a few eager steps toward the window when the grip on his coat sleeve which Captain Hen Berry gave halted him.

"Oz," he advised, in a meaning drawl, "I ain't likin' ye none too well. But I'm givin' ye some good advice. You keep away from True Tisdale. He'd pick th' meat outen ye, swaller hit in one little bite and chuck away th' shell like ye was a periwinkle."

And discretion ever being the better part of valor with the small minder of other people's business, Ozra, after another glance at the big captain at the window subsided, not, however, without a spiteful comment.

"Time fer it, I'd say," he bit off. "Been down to low ebb a darned long time."

Cookie Lewis, club steward, stopped in the wielding of his broom long enough to grin owlishly at Ozra.

"Whyn't ye tell him so, then?" he asked. "I 'low he'd take anything from you. Most anybuddy would—except money. That'd be murder."

In general, though, while the men of the club deplored Trueman's actions, and were disappointed, he was more or less a subject for joyful meetings among the members of the club's Auxiliary. The Tisdale scandal was the one topic of conversation, ever new, and the sheer joy of crucifying the mangled reputation of Martha Tisdale gained new zest from

the opportunity to include Trueman, who had ignored all the eligible daughters of the Auxiliary in favor of a nobody, in the grilling. Tongues flew faster than needles on the days that they foregathered for the fall sewing, for since the existence of the club, few members had done this part of their work in the privacy of their homes.

"It hain't the part of a real man to sit down and do nothin' about it, like Cap'n Tisdale does," was the general opinion, voiced above a general clatter of agreement pitched in varied voices of "That's what I say. Guess he was willing 'nough to let her skip."

It goes without saying that Mehitable Sands was in her glory. All her prophecies were being fulfilled, and now she had an added opportunity.

"Always did think True Tisdale was terribly overrated in this town," she sniffed, and nods from other members answered her—all of them except Mrs. Caleb Fish, who sat quietly with her knitting, but with saddened countenance. Mehitable glanced at her maliciously—she could not neglect so good an opportunity for a fling—as she sneered:

"Hain't heard yer opinion of yer nice young friend's latest innocent caper, 'Stasia."

"And ye won't!" Mrs. Fish's answer was in the nature of an explosion. This throwing to the lions was not much to the liking of faithful Mrs. Fish, champion of the weak. "I thank God that if I kain't say any good of folks, I kin hold my tongue!"

One would have thought that with the passage of time, even such a dereliction as Martha Tisdale's

would have been softened. But instead, there was a constant adding of fuel to the flames by the sight of her husband, going stolidly on his way, as though nothing out of the usual had happened.

"And her gallivantin' all 'round 'th country with another man," eagerly prodded the gossips.

None of them knew, though, none of them could by any chance know—such was the nature of Trueman Tisdale—of the night after night he walked his deck, hands clenched, face strained and drawn, as he fought down the wild primal blood lust within him. If Martha wanted to go—then he must not be the one to keep her. Again and again he argued it with himself, but never could be bring himself to the point that he could say he had not loved Martha—did not love her yet. It had been all his fault—she was so young—he had left her unprotected—had not told her of the things in his heart. Oh, if there was only a chance—a chance—

And when, at length Trueman Tisdale had won his fight, and the instinct to kill had been laid, his towns-folk knew nothing of that, either, for outwardly there was no change in Trueman Tisdale, the silent.

The sun, setting behind the purple of gathering storm clouds that presaged bad weather made a path from the lightship straight across the sparkling waters—not as calm as they had been in the earlier summer weather straight out through the ocean pathway of the Boston steam packets. Trueman Tisdale, smouldering pipe held forgotten in one

hand, leaned over the rail and looked out over that pathway. He was thinking of the steamers' routes and of the big places to which they led. In one of those big cities, probably, was Martha, somewhere, and with her—his big frame shook with a shiver as of a man ill as he tried to put from him the thought. But it persisted, the while he gazed out from the lightship across the dancing waters he did not see.

From below decks came the plaintive wail of Cookie and the rattle of pots in the galley as accompaniment to one of his everlasting chanteys:

"Let go and haul!
Jib sheet and dog rope,
Boom tackle fall,
Stand by your dog rope,
Let go and haul—"

But as far as the captain of the lightship was concerned all might have been as silent as the shore at night with only the little lapping waves against the pebbles to break the quiet. He did not hear. It had been a long time now that he had been falling into those reveries—long for him, but counted in days and weeks, but the length of the fortnight during which Martha Tisdale had been gone—gone, as he and all of Bayport believed—with Nate Sanderson. He did not even hear the familiar chugging of Captain Hen Berry's motor boat until it was alongside, and he was awakened from his thoughts by the long hail of the jovial old seaman demanding a rope be thrown overside.

"Brung ye a couple o' visitors," shouted the old man. "Drop yer ladder."

Though he was far from wanting a visitor or any one else to break into his solitary communion, Trueman Tisdale forced a smile of welcome to his face as the ladder was dropped and he helped Dorothy Merrill over the rail and saw Jack Billings leap lightly after her. Captain Hen shook his head.

"No, I'll be stayin' here," he said in answer to Trueman's invitation. "Don't know how long I'd stay did I come 'board, and night's comin' along, and the wind's shiftin'. Looks like we'd have weather, eh, True?" he asked, cocking his head toward the sky over which the fleecy clouds were already scurrying like sheep before a storm.

Dorothy Merrill held out her hand timidly. She had never quite got over her first awe of the silent husband of the girl she had chosen to call friend, though she had had no fear of speaking her mind to him when the occasion arose.

"I hope you don't mind this unexpected visit, Captain," she said. "But we're going away to-morrow, and I've wanted all summer to see this lightship—"

True smiled politely.

"Delighted, Miss Merrill," he said, "but I'm afraid there's little to see. We're just a few quiet chaps out here, with nothing to do unless a storm comes up, except to see that the lights are kept burning and the bell rings if necessary."

He indicated the huge lightship bell which was

cached rigidly in its hooded cover on the forward deck.

"But if this weather does what it's threatening to do," he went on, his eyes taking in the light froth of white scud that was gently topping the waves, "that bell'll have business to do before many hours."

Patiently and without showing how little he relished his job, the lightship captain showed his visitors about his ship; listened to the usual comments. They stopped at the seaward rail at which he had been standing on their arrival. The faraway gaze that Dorothy gave toward the blue ocean was as detached as Trueman's own. She pointed with a slim white finger toward some sea birds circling toward the coast, as is the way with such when the wind is in the offing.

"Those are gulls, aren't they?" she asked. "Such pretty white things," was the musing addition.

"Yes," Trueman nodded, thinking. "And helpless, too. Dependent things, gulls are. Have you ever heard, Miss Merrill," he asked suddenly, turning to face his guest, "that old sailormen believe that the souls of the oldest and most helpless sailormen who die go into gulls—and that is why they always hover near shore, in the sheltered coves and harbors, and when there is going to be a storm—"

"No, really?" Dorothy was interested.

"And I've heard or read somewhere," Trueman went on, "that it is the same thing with moths. The souls of women go into moths—helpless, fluttering

things—women are like that—" He finished slowly with a bitterness he could not disguise.

Dorothy Merrill bristled unaccountably.

"And men?" she asked suddenly. "I suppose their souls go into—into—*mules* or something like that. Oh, there's no use of hiding it any further, Captain Tisdale. I came out here for one reason, and one alone. I thought maybe you might resent my interfering with your affairs, but—" and she waved a hand imperiously at Trueman as he started to speak, "I don't care if you do. There's something I must say to you—must tell you before I go back to New York—and whether you like it or not, and whether you intend still to belong to the mule class is something I cannot help—but I will tell you this—" and she stressed each word as she hurried on breathlessly, not caring what her host might think or say—"if you don't intend to do anything about that poor child why—I—I will—" She stopped out of breath as she fumbled in the bag she carried. She brought out a letter and half thrust it into Trueman Tisdale's face.

"Here, Captain Tisdale," she announced angrily, and adding sarcastically, "pure, unmovable Captain Tisdale—read that and see what you think of yourself!"

For just a second of time the man stood, with the letter the girl had crushed into his hand, gazing at her. He seemed not to understand. What was this thing Dorothy Merrill could tell him? All the reserve of the Tisdale blood rose up to forbid the

interference of a stranger, but as he held the letter, the warm tingle that crept along his arm told him that it was from Martha—that its meaning could hold only good for him. With bowed head he stood gazing at it, half incredulously.

When he looked up the girl was gone. He heard the silver tinkle of her inconsequent laughter, as though nothing had happened, as she went over the rail and down the rope ladder to Captain Hen's extended hands. The small boat was chugging its way back across the scud of the coming storm when Trueman Tisdale opened the letter he held and read. His heart seemed fairly to stop as he looked at the well-remembered chirography—written thoughts he had not had himself.

"Dear Dorothy

Probably by this time you are thinking the same thing of me that all Bayport is thinking—things that I never imagined one person could think about another. I only found out after it was too late, when that man—but I can barely bring myself to speak of him—told me what it meant, what everyone would think, was thinking—what even True was thinking—but what can that matter, for he did not, does not care. But, really, I came to find my father. He's the one person in the world who needs me, and wants me . . ."

Trueman Tisdale's eyes lifted from the sheet with a start as there photographed itself on his mind the same words in another letter. What could it mean? He permitted himself the ghost of a smile at the incoherency of the missive, the closely written missive, on its three sheets of paper, as though the writing

medium had been a matter of consequence. His heart warmed as he read those words, but, only to be chilled as though with the ice of a Labrador sea, as he went on:

"You have always been my friend, Dorothy, and though everybody else in Bayport thinks I am bad, I just cannot seem to bear that you should, too. He told me he would help me find my father. Then, when we reached Boston that night—Oh, how can men be so terrible. . . . When I reached my room, I slammed the door in his face, and I could hear him fuming. . . . He said some awful things, and laughed—laughed! He told me then that everybody believed that I had come away with him——and that there was no escape. . . ."

Trueman Tisdale's eyes snapped fire, while the hot blood of resentment coursed through his veins—almost to the killing point. It was well for Nate Sanderson that he was aboard his packet that night, far out to sea.

The little more—how Martha had made stint to keep living while she used the few hours she had for searching for her father on the Boston waterfront—by serving as waitress in a restaurant, were passed over hurriedly by the harassed husband.

He had found what he wanted to know. He knew now what he wanted. Action!

His wife! He had always wanted her—until he had thought she did not want him. It was so pitiful, too. The letter she had written to Dorothy Merrill drifted to the deck as his hand searched his pockets for another. It was a worn letter, one showing evidence of having been read many times. He

did not open it, as he held it in his hand, but his head shook mournfully.

"And I could have told her, if I had known," he whispered to the rising sea and the haze-covered sun as it dipped its good-night behind purple clouds. He apostrophized the letter:

"It wasn't such a wonderful death, you died, was it, Pete Rogers—but you are dead and gone, I am sure. No such brawl as this tells me about could have happened aboard any ship that ever sailed, and leave one like you, Pete Rogers, to tell the tale. Yes, Martha, your father has passed on. I could have told you, but. . . ."

The midnight train that night carried Trueman Tisdale as a passenger to Boston.

CHAPTER XVI

IN a downpour that presaged a late August gale—a storm most dreaded by the New England sailormen, Trueman Tisdale alighted at the small railroad station in Bayport, and with him was his wife, Martha. Trueman moved in the direction of the only horse-driven vehicle that had braved the elements and the late hour. Martha's timid light touch on his arm changed his plan.

"No, True, please," she whispered, "I—I don't want them to know—just yet; can't we walk?"

And so, in the torrential rain that soaked the highways, made drab and uninviting the white houses that flanked the cobble-paved streets, and drenched them both to the skin, Trueman Tisdale and his weary wife made their way along the meagerly lighted River Road to the Tisdale home.

With ears keen, Martha Tisdale was alive to everything. She seemed to hear in the rain that drip-dripped from the eaves of the houses the words of contumely that she knew would be her portion when it was known she was back. She longed for a word from Trueman, but he was silent. There had been none, save for those few in that small room of hers in Boston.

As she held to his arms timorously, he guided her

through the stormy night, both buffeted by the gale that momentarily grew greater, she was thinking of those few moments in the city when he had come to her—of the fright that had choked in her throat as he had opened the door and stood there—looking, looking, and had said only: "Come, we are going home."

She remembered how she had tried to tell him—how she had told him nothing—when he had said, in that way to which she had become so accustomed: "Martha, you're my wife! You're to come home!" It might have meant so much. She believed it meant so little, as she would have it mean. She thought she knew Trueman Tisdale—the Trueman she had come to think believed only in a vow for a vow's sake.

The misery in her heart as she plodded along, unknowingly taking the easiest places while Trueman tramped through the pools of water and mud she did not see that she might be saved the worst through the shrieking blasts, made these things of small moment. She did not even know them. She only knew that she was back home—that in Bayport dwelt Mehitable Sands, and—so many others, and Ma Tisdale—

Truman opened the picket gate that sloshed in a pool of water. For the first time since she had left the train, grateful that it was night and that she would not have to face her neighbors too soon, Martha drew back with a shudder. There was a light in the kitchen window—a light that shone out, bringing within its radius the garden and sunflowers

dripping in the drenching rain. In a flash it all came upon her—what it meant coming home.

It had seemed so natural when Trueman had so ordered—there had been the hope that some time she could thoroughly explain to him, though he had given her no chance. How could she know that he already knew—that it was the hurt for her in his own heart that would not let her rehearse her own misery?

The New England in Trueman Tisdale was having its fling to the last. That light in the window and the realization of who was sitting behind it brought it all back to Martha Tisdale with a greater suddenness than the lightning flash that illumined the water until she could distinguish the lightship in the distance—the lightship from which she knew came the regular clang-clang of the bell with its warning to sailors. Ma Tisdale was behind that kitchen light. And scorn—and more indignities. She drew back from Trueman's side.

"Oh, I can't! I can't!" she cried.

A new burst of rain drenched them as she spoke.

"Come," said Trueman, again taking her by the arm, and weakly, as though she had no mind or will of her own, she let him lead her up the shell-bordered walk, to throw open the kitchen door, and inside.

Ma Tisdale, seated in a rocking chair by the kitchen stove, dropped her glasses to the floor as she arose excitedly to her feet at the sight that confronted her—Martha Tisdale, clothing soaked, hat bedraggled, with one red rose leaking its red pro-

test across a pale cheek. But it was her step-son she confronted.

"True Tisdale!" she shrieked. "Are ye crazy? Bringing back that—that—" words failed her as she choked, "inter a decent—"

It was the ominous eyes of Trueman Tisdale—no words were needed—that stopped her. Those eyes were stony—hard as the mechanical voice in which he spoke.

"You leave her alone—now, and always!" His voice was low and tense.

Just for a moment Ma Tisdale considered. She picked up the fallen glasses.

"Or go!" added Trueman, meaningly, while Martha did her best to shrink to nothingness.

With an agility one would not have supposed at her age, Ma Tisdale flung herself toward the hook on which hung her own draggled raincoat.

"All right!" she flung at him. "I will! The Lord'll be with me, but you—with yer abandoned creature—"

The door was opened and Ma Tisdale had gone into the storm-swept night, before Martha had got her breath. She started toward the closed door.

"But she's so old—" she began.

"Not too old to take care of herself—or to be—herself—" said Trueman, with a determined curl to his lip. His tone changed to masterfulness. "You're soaked," he said. "Go 'tend to yourself. You take our room. I'll take the spare."

And as his wife looked her heart out after him, Trueman Tisdale turned on his heel and left the warm kitchen, on the windows of which the announcements of a record-breaking line gale were beating.

CHAPTER XVII

BY morning, the equinoctial storm that had been gathering for the past two or three days, preceded by the downpour of the night before, had increased in its intensity. Bayport's streets and lanes ran rivers. Up from the ocean came the wind that swooped in long gusts from the darkened sky, past the white-capped waters and the breakers that foamed and sizzled over the rocks and sandy beaches of the shore. It swept through the town with its gale-like gusts trying to lose itself in the hills back of the town.

Captain Hen, struggling with his so'wester, passed the old darky, Shiner, out in the early morning, making valiant efforts to keep his fish cart right side up. From the corner of his mouth, Captain Hen spoke:

"Ye'll be worrin' 'bout more than fish 'fore night, I'm tellin' ye, Shiner—ef this here liner keeps on, ye'll be thinkin' of gluein' yer hair on."

"I sure is doin' a tol'ble heap of thinkin' as 'tis—an' it hain't 'bout fish, right now, Cap'n Hen," answered the old peddler, sagely wagging his woolly head. "I hears a heap a-peddlin' fish, and dis mornin' hit seems lak de whole town is jest 'bout ready to 'splode—an' all 'count dat pritty li'l Mis' Martha dun come back—"

Captain Hen stopped still in his tracks.

"What ye mean?" he asked quickly, but Shiner just nodded once more, as he shifted his cart a little to further protect it from a blast of rain and wind that swept down the street. He coughed to clear the mist from his throat—the thick stifling clammy mist that was making its way in from seaward where it was banked thick over the rocks, and made murky clouds as it drifted past men and houses, a most tangible thing.

"Ain't ye heered?" he asked surprisedly. "Cap'n True he went up to Boston come yistiddy, an' last night they done come back. 'Pears like Ma Tisdale she 'lowed she ain't gwine t' stay in the same house wid Mis' Martha, an' she done tuk hit lickety-split ovah to Mis' Sands right in the middle ob de rain, and I 'low they hain't been much sleepin' in the Sands house while Ma Tisdale's got so much to say."

Shiner stopped for a chuckle, but it was too serious a matter to Captain Hen to allow of even a smile. Shiner shoved his battered old hat down a little further on his fringe of whitened hair as he went on.

"Was 'round to Mis' Mehit'bel's a'ready dis mawnin'," he confided. "I axes her lak I allus does, 'How's yo' soul?' and she jest 'humped' me. Den I says, 'Ain't yo jes' sorry, ma'am, foh dat pritty li'l Mis' Tisdale what's come back? Seems lak mos' ev'buddy got a stone to frow at her.' "

Pausing for breath, Shiner continued.

"She jes' storms back at me, wussern' this gale we

is a-facin'. 'Yo git along wid yo' old fish, yo black nigger,' 'lows she.

" 'Ma'am, ma'am,' says I, 'don' yo go scoffin' wid folks dat dutinizes wid fishes. Yo' done forgot dem fisherman ob Galilee. Didn't de Lawd hisself show 'em how to make de high hook cotch? Yas, indeedy, ma'am, souls an' fishes am mighty nigh kin. Yo got to fish foh 'em both mighty keerful.' "

" 'Yo' shut up an' get outer here,' says she, 'I don' take no advice from a dirty old darky.' "

Again he chuckled as he thought of his reply.

"I 'low I got even, Cap'n," he nodded, " 'foh!' says I, 'dey's sumpin else in de good Book, Miss Mehit', dat yo done forget. It says: "Better to dwell in the eye of a needle dan wiv a cantankerous woman!" ' "

The sudden gust of rain-sodden wind that removed Shiner's hat sent him hobbling into the gutter after it. He did not notice that Captain Hen had hurried off in the face of the gale until he rose to see the well-known so'wester flapping down the street. He shoved his own rain-soaked headgear onto his head and, pushing his fish cart as well as he could, shook his old head as he went off muttering: "De droppin's on a rainy day an' a cantankerous woman am de same, saith de proverb."

So Martha Tisdale was back. That was the thought that was lending wings to Captain Hen's short fat legs. He knew what it meant—what it would mean to her. He groaned inwardly as he considered the choice morsel, that had just been handed

him by the old negro, would be in the town that day. And his tender old heart ached for the girl who had come back to face it. He had no way of knowing, as did Martha's husband, that she had been blameless in the escapade that had become a town sensation, but the charity in his heart made him insist that whatever she had done, she had been driven to it only by the evil tide of gossip of the Bayporters he knew.

The least he could do would be to go out to the Tisdale home and tell Martha that he was glad she was back. Poor child! She would need a friendly voice.

And Captain Caleb, too, if he could find him. Not likely he would be at the club this early in the morning, but Captain Caleb always loved storms, and he loved to feel that a deck was under his feet on such a day as this. There was a chance he might be at the club.

Captain Hen headed toward the old West Indy warehouse, facing the gale as he had done a good many hundred times before with no more than elation that his human strength could battle against the elements.

It was with a shock of surprise that he opened the door of the club to face Ma Tisdale. What on earth could she be doing here so early on such a stormy morning? But she set him at rest.

"Humph!" she sniffed. "Ye men can't keep away from this here club no matter what. Seems like the wimmin might have a chance onc't in a while

when they have important business to confer over with. Thought by callin' a meetin' early we'd be shet of a lot of ye."

"Why, what's the matter, Ma?" Captain Hen looked blank.

The sniff of Ma's nose almost upset her spectacles.

"Matter 'nough," she observed. "What with True Tisdale bringin' that—" Her fury overcame her.

"She's his wife," Captain Hen loyally observed. "Guess it's a man's duty to look after his wife no matter what happens—"

"Not when she took off, like she did with Nate Sanderson," scowled Ma. "There's some things that nuthin' excuses." She warmed to her subject as she spoke in a martyred tone. "From the day he married her I've been expectin' somethin'. I've always had the feelin' it was just a matter of time, and now—" She sighed with hypocritical resignation, as she spread her hands.

Captain Hen looked off through the rain-spattered windows. Well he knew how little use argument would be with a woman of Ma Tisdale's stern and rockbound nature, but he could not refrain from a single retort.

"She sort o' reminds me of a ship I sailed in," he said gently. "In calm weather she behaved like the lady she were, but in a squall she'd act up sort o' frightened, as if she warn't jest sure of her bearin's. Best man in the fleet at her helm, but he didn't seem to do no good. One day we found somebuddy'd

fouled her rudder with a rope. 'T warn't her fault, after all, ye see. Life's pretty much like the sea, and ships can be mighty human."

Ma Tisdale flounced toward the stair door that opened into the Auxiliary rooms.

"I've more confidence in ships than in most people," she announced over her retreating shoulder.

Captain Hen nodded. "Right fer onc't," he agreed. "So've I. We're generally more careful of how a ship's keel is laid than we are how humans are brung up."

It was Captain Caleb Fish that put an end to what might have been a long soliloquy on the little man's part. He did not greet his friend ceremoniously, though there passed between them a look of well understood sympathy.

"Talkin' to wimmin," observed Captain Caleb finally, "is a mighty precarious business; sort o' like catchin' lobsters. You got ter git 'em behind the ears when they hain't lookin'." Then his tone changed to a more serious one as his glance went to the door through which Ma Tisdale had flounced. "Looks as though more trouble's brewin', eh, Hen?" he asked.

For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes. What each saw satisfied him. They understood each other in the way of old sailormen without words of explanation. Captain Hen spoke slowly: "Mebby nuthin' to worry 'bout. Trouble takes some time to develop. That's where elements is a heap kinder than some humans; they give warnin'

mostly when they're goin' to bust out. Say, Cap'n Caleb, don't you 'low we might jest as well be gittin' on down the River Road?"

It was a girl who was a wan ghost of her usual pink-cheeked self, towards whose home the old seamen trudged down the River Road. A girl whose ring-darkened eyes told of a vigil while the rain beat down on her husband's roof, and she listened to the breaking of the roaring surf down below the cottage to which he had brought her as a bride, and now once more had brought her as an erring wife. That she was not erring was of little consequence. She believed that Trueman thought so; his very silence must mean that.

It was a commentary on how little she knew her husband when she could not even guess that that very silence was his idea of easing things for her. She must know, argued his staunch heart, that he believed in her—trusted her. To question would be to prove a doubt.

Eagerly she had watched for a sign from him that he loved her, but it had not been forthcoming. In as stolid silence as they had made the trip from Boston, with all the matter-of-factness of every-day occurrence, Trueman had gone about eating the breakfast she had prepared, and started on the morning chores—bringing in wood, seeing to the feeding of the chickens—doing all of the things that would otherwise have taken the girl out into the mud and rain. But not once had he spoken a word that would have been as balm to her sore heart.

Oh, she had done wrong to come back! She was sure of it! Why had she been so weak—so easily led by her heart when she had seen her big husband standing there in the door of that rooming house asking her to come back. He had seemed such a haven of strength, but now— If he didn't love her—had only done what he had through a sense of duty— Oh, what was the use of it?

She had wandered into the dimly lit sitting room as she half-heartedly tried to go about her duties as though taken up from the day before. The very fact that the strident tones of Ma Tisdale's voice were missing, though, was an ever conscious proof that things were different. Her eyes wandered to the old piano. She remembered Dorothy Merrill sitting there in the twilight singing. What was that Dorothy had sung?

"I shall love thee, dear, forever,
Though the years shall pass away—"

Oh, if he only did!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE sound of hearty voices through the rain, voices and crunching footsteps coming up the path from the River Road toward the kitchen door, made Martha Tisdale shrink for a moment. Then she recognized the voices and went to open the door herself. Captain Hen and Captain Caleb stood there.

Captain Hen's hand went out. "Wal, wal," cheered Captain Hen. "Glad to see ye back—both of ye!" turning toward Trueman who moved toward them with a load of kindlings in his arms. Impulsively Martha grasped both of the small fat captain's hands as she drew him into the cheery kitchen with its clean tidies on the backs of chairs, a custom in vogue in Bayport since they were kitchens more often than "sittin' rooms" that were the scene of most hospitality. There was a sigh of relief, too, as her warm hands pressed the old man's.

Captain Caleb's big voice boomed out.

"An' me, too, Martha!" It was almost with a sob instead of a murmured thanks that she answered both men. How wonderful they were—they who had no idea of the true facts of the case, but who chose to be loyal to her for loyalty's sake.

Inside, Trueman Tisdale waved his guests to seats. He turned to his wife.

"I think a little nip of that old Medford wouldn't do these wet old fellows a bit of harm, Martha," he announced.

As she disappeared, Trueman Tisdale came forward a step. His attitude was a bit more truculent than either of them were accustomed to.

"Well," he said speculatively, as he looked them over. "I suppose you're wondering where Sanderson is?" Their silence was sufficient.

Trueman Tisdale turned to look out of the window at the trees that bent under the gusts that swept in from the open sea in front of his house. "I don't know," he said simply. But as he noted the amazed expression on the kindly faces, he opened up a bit—for him.

"Cap'n Hen," he said slowly, and with the manner of a man who does not intend to be questioned, "and Cap'n Caleb, you're my friends. Your coming here to-day has proved that, if you had not a thousand times before. There are a lot of things I can't tell you—now—" He did not intimate that his reason for not talking more freely to his wife, opening his heart to her—the fact that he wanted to be trusted without question as he trusted others. "I'll tell you this. She was not with him—had not been since the night she got to Boston—"

Captain Caleb's big fist clenched.

"By godfrey! Ye mean th' dirty dog left her?" he began, but Trueman's smile was noncommittal.

"Had no chance to, far as I know—she had other reasons for going to Boston—"

Captain Hen lumbered from his seat and came to face the lightship captain he had known as man and boy. He laid his hand on Trueman's shoulder.

"True," he said, "I believe ye—and her. But it's goin' ter be gosh-a-mighty hard ter make folks in this here town believe it."

Trueman Tisdale had not framed an answer when the kitchen door burst open unceremoniously, and Ozra Hemingway, rain-bespattered and breathing hard from the exertion of his run down the River Road, brought up short at the sight of the two men who were with the man he had come to see, and whose secrets he was determined to worm out, if possible.

"Oh, thar ye be, True, sure 'nough," he whined. "Back again, I see. Humph!" His sharp eyes sought out the farthest corners; his ferret ears were sharpened for sounds he did not hear. He beamed hypocritically.

"Knew ye wouldn't be fool 'nough ter bring her—like they was sayin'—"

Trueman Tisdale's voice rang out like the warning bell of his own lightship, as he swung on the small sea cook.

"Well, I brought her!" His temper seethed at the aghast expression that was all too noticeable in Ozra's eyes, but he went on: "This is my home. She's my wife— Yes, what about it?"

For once Ozra Hemingway's temerity was put to test. He shrunk back against the kitchen door as the master of the house strode toward him.

"And I'm a fool, am I?" Trueman was menacing.

"I wasn't meanin' nuthin', True," Ozra whined. "I was jest thinkin' what they're sayin' and—"

True's voice was the snap of a whip. "I don't care what they're saying; I don't care what they're thinking! I'm master of my ship and when I need their help, I'll let them know!"

It was hard to entirely subdue Ozra Hemingway, once he had a choice topic. But his discretion always stood him in stead. He did not speak until he had opened the kitchen door back of him.

"Ye'll be sorry," he warned, in his hateful whine.

"Then I'll be sorry," came back Trueman's retort as he turned on his heel as though to get from his sight the vision of the wizened gossip.

Ozra Hemingway edged his way half through the open doorway, through which whipped rain and the noise of the storm came louder than in the closed room. He gave a parting fling.

"She's a—" he began, but his words were cut short by the onslaught of the lightship captain who was upon him. Only the restraining hands of Captain Hen and Captain Caleb saved the small man who for once in his life had gone too far. It was the tones of ruddy Captain Hen's voice that steadied the husband of the woman who had been reviled.

"Steady on th' hal'yards, True! Steady! Ye don't want to snag no sea shark!"

But Trueman Tisdale jerked loose one hand to

shake menacingly at the figure of Ozra half-sheltered in the open doorway.

"Get out of here before I kill you!" he roared. "Get out and stay out."

So intent was he on his condemnation that he did not see Martha as she came from down cellar, the bottle held in her hand. But Ozra Hemingway did not fail to see her, nor did she fail to see the evil light that crossed his wizened face at the sight of her. She sat down limply in the nearest chair as the door slammed behind Ozra Hemingway to the accompaniment of a gust of wind that rocked the Tisdale home. She shook with fear and it was not from the crash of the storm.

"Trueman," she wailed. "Oh, what is it? What has happened? Was—was it—about me?"

But her husband's answer was as much to his guests as to his wife.

"Just another human I wanted to kill. Never used to think that way. Never thought I could."

"Trueman! Trueman!" Martha's wail lifted above the roar of the tempest. "You mustn't say things like that—you mustn't think them—you mustn't. Oh, I shouldn't have come back here! I told you it was wrong!"

"I brought you back." Her husband's lips closed with a finality. As he stood in front of her cowering in her chair, they neither of them saw the movement of Captain Hen and Captain Caleb toward the kitchen door.

Captain Hen whispered: "Full crew's 'nough for any ship. No use crowdin'. We'll go ashore?"

Captain Caleb nodded, as they tiptoed toward the door and closed it softly behind them.

One arm over her eyes, Martha Tisdale sobbed out her heart. "Oh, I can see it all so clearly. Each day is going to be harder; every morning is going to mean waking up to—"

With an effort she controlled herself, but it was mechanically, as though a sleepwalker were speaking that she went on. "First it was Ma—then—No," and her head shook slowly "they'll never understand —they'll believe the worst—they—they'll never forgive me—never.

"Martha." Trueman's tone held a hint of tenderness under the forcefulness of his Spartan touch. "You'll have to face it."

Something in that tone made her look up eagerly. Made her try for another time.

"Oh, I could, I could," she plead, "with you, True—I could face anything. But to be alone— And now—oh, it seems that you are so much farther from me than ever before—"

There was a dull look of fright in her eyes and voice as she plead, as though she believed it hopeless, but there was fear of the prospect before her. Without turning toward her as he stood at the kitchen window watching the gale make windrows in his loved garden, he spoke simply.

"You must try, Martha—try, for both of our sakes. I—I was going to stay ashore, but I've been

thinking about it, and I know it will be better to go on as before. Then you'll have your chance to show these people that they're wrong. When—"

He did not hear the half-whispered interruption of his wife as she sat rocking herself gently backward and forward, her hand stroking the fur of the old gray cat that had huddled against her knees with its friendly purring greeting.

"I understand—I understand, True," she kept repeating monotonously. "You've done all you could do—much more than most men would do—"

"So you must make them see for both our sakes," went on her husband, with no hint of the gentleness she had noted before. Now it was the Puritanical Tisdale speaking, the scion of all the Tisdales to whom duty was a word paramount. "When I took you for my wife it was for better or for worse. That's what I promised. I'm not forgetting."

The half-smothered cry that came from Martha Tisdale might have been the result of a physical blow. Half-consciously he seemed to note it. "I'm not meaning to be unkind," he amended. "I went to Boston after you because it's a man's duty to save his wife. I'd have done that even if I'd been sure you'd committed the great sin."

Martha leapt to her feet. Her arms were extended, imploringly, pleadingly, as she took a halting step toward her husband.

"But I didn't, True, I didn't! You know I didn't!" she sobbed. But the pleading arms were left to drop achingly to her sides. Trueman Tisdale

turned once more from his wife to gaze out over the storm-ridden sea. His voice was almost harsh as he answered—and once more none but he knew the battle that was being waged within him to take that erring girl wife in his arms and let her sob out her heart on his own.

Not yet, however, had his habit of repression worn itself out. Not yet had there come the stress that would tear it from its moorings in his nature forever to give a vent for the deep kindly love that was the basis of his whole soul.

"You don't have to prove anything to me," was his only answer. "It's the others. I love you."

So simply were the last three words spoken that Martha could not believe she had really heard them. Her own heart, that emotional heart that had been so starved, was in her mouth as she ran to him, clutched at his unresponsive coat sleeve as she whispered: "And I love you, Trueman—I do—oh, I do! You believe it, don't you?"

"Trying to. Trying hard—" Not even the motion of an eyelash in her direction rewarded the girl wife as she turned brokenly and once more dropped into her chair.

"If I thought you didn't—why—"

"It's your battle, now." At last Trueman turned from the window and his deep eyes sought out those of his wife. "You must win it alone."

"I—was only thinkin' that when men like Ozra—" she murmured softly, but there was a

dominant note, unheard before in Trueman Tisdale's tones as he whirled to march up and down the room.

"Then that's my battle," he said conclusively and with a savage note that was a new one to Martha Tisdale.

All day the storm raged with unabated violence. Out at sea the clouds were low and black, torn by the wind, driving up from the southwest like mad, threatening still heavier weather. Spume and spray shot up from the rocks near shore like a fog.

It was such a day as Bayporters were usually glad to stay indoors—to listen to the patter or sharp gusts of rain on their weathered roofs and thank God for those roofs. But to-day it was different. Not even a wind that turned umbrellas inside out, or made so'westers all but useless was enough to keep man or woman of Bayport indoors when there was so much to discuss.

The post office was as filled at mail time as it had ever been on any sunny day during the summer. The splash of rain on roofs was unnoticed through the clatter of tongues beneath in competition. There had been nothing so vital to discuss in Bayport since the hanging of old Sid Traymore who had murdered his wife down in one of those fishing shacks on the beach—the same sort of shack that had housed Martha Rogers when her father had been alive.

Once more Martha Tisdale was on the grill, and while she ate her heart out, out there in her home beside the booming breakers, her fate was in the

hands of this mob whose fury was no less than that of the elements, and, as Captain Hen had remarked, not half as kind.

Ozra Hemingway was everywhere. As the day wore on, it was he who was indefatigable in carrying messages and the newest bits of gossip from house to house. He it was who was the chief messenger of the Woman's Auxiliary who had declared it a holiday, and held an all-day session, much to the disgust of the old-timers who came right in, looked around, and walked right out again.

Early, Ma Tisdale had been commanding general, but things began to thicken like the clouds over the town when it was given out in the late afternoon that Ma Tisdale, martyr that she was in the eyes of her cohorts, had finally collapsed from sheer worry and righteous indignation, and had been put to bed in Mehitable Sands' spare room.

Twilight fell early on the muggy, sullen day. Out in the Tisdale home, Trueman Tisdale, not yet with his mind made up to go and leave his wife in this, her crisis—despite the fact that because of the storm he should be aboard the lightship—lighted the kitchen lamp from a taper he lit over the open fire of the stove, and set it so that its rays fell out of the window where the blackness was gathering deeper. He was thinking hard—harder than he ever had before. He was wondering if, after all, he understood Martha. There had been just another passage between them. Martha had been deploring the absence of Ma Tisdale.

"It's all wrong, True," she had cried. "This is her home—and yours—I'm only an outsider—I can't blame her for not wanting to stay, thinking the way she does. I came back with you, but deep down in my heart I was afraid that there wouldn't be but one way out of it all. All during the trip home, I was praying and hoping it wouldn't have to come to this—but there doesn't seem to be any use. Now that it has come, I'm the one to go. I'm the one who *must* go!"

Trueman's answer was characteristically short.

"You're my wife, Martha. You stay here, no matter who else goes."

He might have said more, but for the sudden interruption of a pounding on the kitchen door, which was hastily flung open by Captain Caleb, who, followed by the lustily breathing Captain Hen, indicating that the trip to the Tisdale home had been a hurried one, was fairly blown into the room by a sharper blast of wind.

The storm had developed to tropical hurricane proportions. Intermittent flashes of sharp lightning, followed by thunderous crashes, indicated that a local storm had developed over head and had mingled with the equinoctial fury, the combined elements conspiring to create a veritable inferno of din and strife.

With the entrance of Captain Hen and Captain Caleb, their way was lighted by so sharp a flash of lightning with its attendant roaring clap of thunder

that Martha involuntarily closed her eyes and covered her ears with her hands.

Only Trueman was calm. He looked inquiringly at his excited visitors.

"What's it now, Captain Caleb?" he queried.

"It's that Ozra, again, True—the yellow skunk!" The burly captain's words came with an explosion, but still the lightship captain's calmness was not disturbed.

"What's he doing?" was his second query.

"'Tain't so much what he's doin', it's what he's sayin'," Captain Hen, who blowing like a porpoise, and clawing at his whisker fringe, found breath to offer his bit. Then Tisdale frowned ominously.

Captain Caleb shook his head. "Warnin' ain't goin' to do no good now, True," he said dolefully. "Ye don't know what he and them others has been up to all day. Right there in the club they was, but how the gosh-a-mighty they would want ter git out in this storm is more'n I can say—and Oz a'talkin' to 'em, a tellin' 'em how Ma Tisdale had been put out o' house and home and is grievin' herself to death over to Mehit' Sands' place, an' all of them wimmin a-waggin' their heads an' agreein' with him in what he said 'bout—'bout—"

He did not mention the name of Trueman's wife as his kindly keen old eyes watched her as she stood with clenched hands and frightened expression, waiting for she knew not what. But both she and her husband knew who Captain Caleb meant without words from him. "An' men a noddin' to one an-

other," he added, with a snort of disgust that he must confess this about any man in Bayport.

"An' that's why we've come, True." It was Captain Hen who took up the tale. "We heered them—and they're comin' here—we didn't beat them by much—ye hear?"

He cocked his head to one side in a familiar listening attitude as above the storm clamor could be heard the unmistakable sounds of voices—many voices—and raised in the angry protests of a mob spirit that has been wrought up diligently to the point of explosion.

Back against the wall Martha shrank, her eyes widening in a face that was already too pale from the emotions of two eventful days. Her hands were clenched at her breast, as she listened.

Trueman, too, heard, but for a moment there was no movement from him except a stiffening of his tall young figure as he said simply:

"I'm ready for them."

There were those of his neighbors, whom the eloquence of Ozra Hemingway had persuaded to interfere with Trueman Tisdale's running of his own affairs, who might not have felt such a righteous exaltation as they sloshed along in the mud of the River Road, or shrunk from the nearness of lightning flashes, could they have seen the eyes of Trueman Tisdale just then.

A shout, louder than the mumble of angry voices which had been the first herald of the approach of those who disapproved of the lightship captain—

and of his wife! It sounded like a cry of triumph. The vanguard of the self-appointed administrators of the Tisdale affairs had gained the small gate at the end of the shell-bordered walk.

Another and another! The sound, with the suddenness of the electric display outside the house, galvanized Trueman Tisdale into action. In one bound he had reached the kitchen door as his hand, which in passing had jerked his so'wester from the table with its lighted lamp, jammed that headgear down over his ears.

Quick as he was, though, Captain Hen Berry was a little quicker. He stood before that door with outstretched arms, his chubby little legs wide apart as though he were clinging to the deck of a gale-riding ship, his stocky figure an effective barrier.

"It won't do ye no good, True," he argued. "They're an ugly lot. We've seen 'em—that's why we come—to tell ye not to see 'em."

Trueman's harsh laughter held a menace.

"Not see them?" he mocked. "I'm going to *meet* them. You get out of my way, Cap'n Hen Berry!" His long arm shot out to take the small ruddy captain from his path, but it was stopped halfway by the firm grasp of Captain Caleb.

"Hen's right, True," he said firmly. "You can't do nuthin' now—"

"Can't, eh?"

His voice was a snarl of rage as he heard the roars of his townsmen and women outside in the

storm's wildness, their clamor persistent even above the anger of the elements.

"Can't, eh? I'll show—" It was a new Trueman Tisdale.

But the arm he sought to wrench from the binding grasp of his friend was gripped by a new hold. Through the window, guided by lightning flashes, Martha Tisdale had seen that oncoming mob—had recognized members of it, had seen the bitterness on wild countenances of the bedraggled, mud-spattered women and the determined hunching of rain-soaked masculine shoulders. She had realized what it meant. Her hands which had helplessly fluttered to her throat to stifle the low moan of anguish which had first come, came down to clench into fists. Then in two panther-like bounds she was beside her husband and the two men struggling with him to keep him from rushing out into the night.

"But I can, True, I can!" she screamed, clutching at his arm imploringly. Her husband fixed her with the stern gaze before which she had always quailed, but for once it had lost its efficacy. "You get out of here—upstairs," he ordered. "This is my affair."

Wildly Martha shook her head, as her hands clutched his sleeve more tightly.

"No! No! It's mine! It's mine!" she cried. "Oh, True, you wanted me to show these people, and I'm going to—I'm going to—" She dashed breathlessly on, unheeding either the gazes of amaze of the two doughty old captains or the disapproval of her husband. She ignored his attempted interrup-

tion. "You told me I had to show them I had the right to live, to breathe, to think, to be human. Well, now my chance has come, and I'm going to do it! Listen to them out there—snarling, like a lot of snapping dogs that want to get at their prey—"

Captain Caleb's hold loosened on Trueman's arm as the latter whirled on his wife. "You're not going to do anything," he told her with finality. "I'm taking this up with Ozra." With one arm he sought to force her backward from the kitchen door, sought to loosen the grip on his arm. But, shaking, trembling, pleading, she held on.

"No! No!" she screamed. "*I am* taking it up—*I* am! I am the one who's been the cause of it all, and I am going out there and face them and tell them the truth—the truth! Do you understand! It doesn't matter that I have never wanted to do wrong—that I have never wanted to harm any one—you least of all, but it's been done and it's them—they—!" And her arm made a swinging gesture of emphatic disgust toward the door through which could be heard the close angry murmurs of the gathered townspeople, their voices rising high above the tumult of the winds. Her voice, that had been pitched so high in the passion of her pleading, broke heart-rendingly. "Oh, True! True!" came her sob. "You told me I must make my own fight. That is what you wanted. And you haven't any right to take this chance away from me!"

Gently, but with determined force, Trueman Tis-

dale pushed his wife, foot by foot, away from the door through which she was determined to go. His face was stern and set but his voice coolly masterful as he looked levelly into her eyes to bring to her his full meaning.

"I forbid it, Martha," he told her. "And I am master here. You are my wife, and this time I fight for both of us." Again she sought to break away from him, but he had reached the other side of the room.

"Go to your room!" he ordered sternly, but as she subsided in a limp heap against the wall, his voice was softer as he added: "You will leave this to me—if you love me."

Frantic pounding on the outside kitchen door interrupted Martha Tisdale before the words of pleading that were on her lips were framed. From outside a roar went up to an accompaniment of thunder and a flash of lightning that lit up the farthest corners of the kitchen. It was Ozra Hemingway's voice above all that they recognized—Ozra, in his element as self-constituted spokesman, his voice filled with what he believed a command of outraged righteousness.

"Open the door!" he commanded, and there was something in that command that made Martha collapse shiveringly against the wall as her husband turned to stride across the room.

Unobtrusively, Captain Hen Berry slid across to take his place beside the frightened girl, and it was his hand of comfort that she half-consciously

realized was patting her own. Hysterically she gripped it. Oh, it was so good to find one hand not turned against her!

Again came the command from outside as the timbers of the doorway shook with the insistent knocking.

"Open that door, or we will—"

But before True had reached it in answer to the summons, Captain Caleb Fish had grasped his arm.

"Don't do it, True," he urged. "It will only mean more trouble, and—"

"Open that door!"

In the face of the storm, Trueman Tisdale threw open the door before the command had been completed. Outside, the faces of his townspeople were outlined in the flashes of the storm. But they were not the kindly faces of the Bayporters he believed he knew. They were wry faces, distorted with a strange passion of the Puritans who on so many other occasions before had flayed women.

In the open doorway, True Tisdale towered above the wizened-faced man, the leader of the mob who had come to denounce. His face was cold and set as he spoke quietly.

"Well, Ozra Hemingway," he demanded, "what are you wanting?"

CHAPTER XIX

FOR a full moment the tableau held. As Trueman Tisdale looked scornfully out past their leader to the mob of men and women he had once thought friends, there was only the labored breathing of men to be heard. Then a whimper from a rain-drenched woman on the outer circle and the quick-drawn sigh of Martha Tisdale broke the tension. It did so as effectively as the sudden roar and streak of blinding light that flashed down out of the darkened sky in the wind-swept night.

With his usual belligerent assurance, Ozra Hemingway regained control of himself as he heard the murmured urgings of those he led.

"What's the matter?" he whined, sarcastically. "Are ye afeered of us?"

With one movement of his mighty arm Trueman Tisdale swept the small man into the room behind him, and it was Captain Caleb Fish who slammed the door in the faces of the advance guard who sought to follow. The shouts of anger that greeted this action did not tend to ease the fast-beating heart of Martha, who clung to Captain Hen Berry's hand, her fingers gripped into his flesh.

"I'm asking you, Hemingway," Trueman Tisdale ground out through clinched teeth, as he held Ozra

Hemingway off to look squarely into his eyes, "I'm asking you again—what are you wanting?"

Like a small puffy pouter pigeon, the little sea cook blew out his narrow chest while his new suspender threatened to break at the vigor with which it snapped against his body.

"I'm representin' th' people of this community," he squealed importantly, but it was Captain Hen's snort that stopped him.

"Ye're not representin' me, Oz Hemingway," he interrupted, and it was with a vigorous nod of meaning that he was supported by Captain Caleb who, standing with legs wide apart in that manner so reminiscent of the days he strode a ship's deck, gave added assurance.

"Nor me," said Captain Caleb.

Supported by the roar of the waiting mob which broke out with renewed violence at the delay, and the fact that they were shut out of the important happenings, the spokesman once more began, in answer to Trueman:

"Anyway, we're here. And we—"

Quiet as she had been since the demand on her husband to open the door, the tension was too much for Martha Tisdale. Too quick for Captain Hen's restraining hand, she leapt forward to face her traducer, as she spoke quickly, half hysterically:

"Oh, True," she wailed, "don't let him say anything—anything! You—" and she turned passionately on Ozra as her whole slender body shook with the violence of her emotions. "You," she cried, "and

your lying tongue! You, with your narrow, heartless, frozen hearts and consciences that have been taken out of a book! You hypocrites—"

"Martha!" Trueman Tisdale's voice was a stern command.

But the girl's onslaught had not phased Ozra Hemingway. He was sullen as he looked past her, his eyes never meeting her own.

"I'm talkin' to yer husband," he informed her.

"I'm listening." There was the snap of a whip in Trueman's answer, and he seemed not to notice the wife who had again turned from him for the comforting clasp of Captain Hen Berry's hand.

"It's reached th' point where we kain't let no woman who has—" again began the little man, but once more it was Martha who interrupted him, her hands flung out in a passionate gesture toward the speaker.

"Oh, you sha'n't say it! You sha'n't! You sha'n't!" she cried wildly, so wildly that Trueman turned for one moment from the man whom he had not ceased to try to face down to lay his hand gently on his wife's arm. But he did not look at her as he spoke. His eyes, with their lowering brows, were all for Ozra Hemingway. And it was that look on the face of the man he had come to denounce for his action in defending his own wife that made Ozra Hemingway wish most sincerely that he had not been brought into that house alone. He needed the support of the muttering crowd outside, that crowd wrought up to its present passion by

words of his own as much as by anything else—the words he had spent the day in scattering. And so with his gaze never faltering from Ozra, Trueman Tisdale took time for one soothing remark to his wife he would quiet.

"You said you loved me, Martha," he reminded, but it was a different tone he used to the small man. "I'm waiting, Ozra Hemingway."

Ozra cleared his throat.

"It's all bin talked over," he hesitated, "and—and, well," he exploded, with a trace of his former belligerency, as he gained courage from the shouts that went up outside. "Ye might as well know, True Tisdale. It's bin decided Martha's got ter leave this town!"

"Who says that?" The crack of the whip was in the husband's voice again.

"It's bin decided." Ozra was sullenly holding his ground.

"It's a God Almighty outrage, that's what hit is," exploded Captain Hen as his hands gripped Martha's, but the more tightly as though to give her still further assurance of his friendship.

"Who says it?" said Trueman Tisdale again, and his jaw shot out in a menace that Ozra Hemingway did not fail to note, nor to make its impression. More than ever he was beginning to find little relish for the job that but a short time before he had been so eager to undertake. It was one thing to hold the center of the stage with an approving and applauding audience to back him up, and quite another to

go through his dramatics alone, and especially to face down such a man as Trueman Tisdale. There was a glint in Trueman's eye and a tone in his voice that Ozra Hemingway did not like—distinctly did not like—nor did he like so much being alone with Trueman and Captain Caleb and Captain Hen and Martha. Furtively he glanced about him toward the door before he answered. And the fear that was beginning to show itself was not lessened as he saw Captain Caleb stride unobtrusively toward the door before which he placed his huge bulk. Ozra Hemingway must, it looked pretty certain, go on with what he had started.

"Well?" Trueman shot out the one word. "Who says it?" he repeated.

With a sweep of his hand Ozra indicated the mob outside, which was getting more clamorous with the passage of time, and with the storm which was beating down with ever-increasing fury—a storm to discourage any but those who had been wrought up for hours to the fanatical condition that could make them disregard personal comfort.

"All of 'em—out thar'," said Ozra, and then, his truculence returning for a moment more as he gained courage by the shouts. "An' I'm waiting ter take yer answer back ter 'em."

For the first time, all the fury that Trueman Tisdale had been withholding in that quiet exterior of his, but which had seethed beneath the surface until it had reached the explosion point, burst forth. His voice was not a roar, but a hard, steel-like intonation

that shut out the roar of the wind and thunder as hard fists doubled themselves to be shaken toward the outside mob.

"Damn them!" it came. "Damn them!" he repeated, and those friends who had known him through all his quiet years had never imagined that Trueman Tisdale could hold such a depth of passion as his contorted face displayed.

Step by step, each one a menacing one, he advanced on Ozra Hemingway, who shivered as he retreated, looking wildly about for a chance to escape. Trueman's hands seemed about to clutch the small stringy throat that rose above Ozra's frayed shirt, as his eyes fastened on the frightened rat eyes.

"So you want an answer, do you?" he went on as he inched toward the retreating little gossip. "Well, then, you tell them that I have run my house in the past; that I am still running it; that I am going to run it so long as God leaves a breath of life in my body, and that I am going to run it without their help. Tell them that!"

At the door, Ozra Hemingway was seeking to escape the wrath of the advancing man. But it was Captain Caleb whose mountainous body intervened between him and his mouthing cohorts outside—whose angry voices were getting louder and louder as though in competition with the rage of the storm. He struggled with the man who barred his progress.

"Let me out! Let me out!" he screamed in a high tone of terror, but Captain Caleb shook his head as he refused to move his huge bulk. And it was then that Trueman Tisdale acted. One of his

big hands shot out to grasp the small man by the neck. With the other he lifted him high in air, and shook him as a terrier might shake a rat—shook him so that his protests of fright were incoherent.

With words that accented each shake of the small body, Trueman Tisdale rasped in a voice that terrified.

"Once before you made me want to kill you," he hissed, "and now—"

With all his small might, Ozra Hemingway struggled in the grasp of the man he had infuriated to the point of being a potential murderer.

"Let me go—let me go!" he begged in tones of fright. "Yer chokin' me—"

"Careful, True—" Captain Hen Berry, into whose arms Martha had thrown herself to hide her face at the sight of her husband's rage, admonished the maddened lightship captain, but Trueman seemed not to have heard.

One final shake he gave the man he held, and then as he strode forward, still holding him from him, it was to Captain Caleb that he spoke.

"Open the door!"

Rain that swept in a fury across the door sill and a crash of thunder with its close-attending lightning, met them as the door was flung open. Outside, they could see the faces that pressed forward and could hear the shouts of anger as those he led beheld Ozra Hemingway held high in air in the Tisdale kitchen doorway. There was a concerted rush forward.

The kitchen lamp flickered and all but went out as the gusts of wind swept through the room.

"Let me go!" shrieked Ozra, and there was a wildness in his voice as he begged the mob he could not see. "Don't let him kill me—"

A shake from the hand of Trueman Tisdale, and his pleading died in his throat. But it was not to Ozra that the infuriated husband spoke. He was through with him, save for the example of what might be expected at the hands of this new Trueman Tisdale. Above the roar of the wind, above the thunder crashes, he bellowed to those men and women outside there on his pebbled walk and rain-drenched grass plots and flower beds.

"You're wanting your answer," he roared, and he held Ozra still higher for the one moment before he flung him out into the midst of the excited Bayporters. "Here it is!" And Ozra Hemingway fell plunk onto the so'wester of Mehitable Sands, and clutched at her sodden raincoat as they both went down in a howling mass into the puddle of water that had been Martha Tisdale's nasturtium bed.

But Trueman Tisdale was not concerned with Mehitable Sands any more than with Ozra Hemingway. He did not mince words.

"Here is your answer! Damn you and your rotten tongues.

"You all wanted Martha to go wrong—you're happy because you think something's happened!

"To HELL with all of you—you nest of hissing snakes! That's my answer! To HELL with you!"

CHAPTER XX

TRUEMAN TISDALE'S mind was in a curious jumble. That was evidenced when he did not even hear the boom of the gun that carried inshore from far out across the roaring breakers and the turbulent spindrift, the seething expanse of waters that had but a short period before been as peaceful as an inland lake. It was not like Trueman, nor like any Tisdale, not to hear a signal gun—the signal gun from his own lightship.

Outside, they had heard it—as did Captain Hen and Captain Caleb—and it was the boom of that gun that had turned those neighbors of Trueman Tisdale's from their purpose of breaking down his door, a purpose that Captain Hen and Captain Caleb were bent on frustrating when they had rushed out, leaving Trueman there in his chair, motionless and silent, now that he had had his say.

"That gun is from the lightship—we'll take a look," Captain Hen had whispered, as he unhooked a pair of marine glasses from the kitchen wall. The two men slipped out all but unnoticed save for the grateful glance and warm handclasp of thanks that Martha Tisdale gave them as she hesitated whether or not to speak to her husband.

It was with a concerted movement that the men and women—much of their fury against Martha and

Trueman already expended in their damp wait, and the ignominious failure of Ozra Hemingway to bring to a climax any of the things he had so pompously asserted he would accomplish—turned toward the beach with its fuming breakers. Again came the boom of the lightship's signal proclaiming to the people ashore the danger that lay for some poor unfortunates out in that raging sea.

Not a soul in Bayport but who knew such things only too well—not one but who had heard tales of wrecks along that coast since childhood. Too many there were who had known heartache and unforgotten griefs brought about by the treachery of the cruel jutting rocks of Ripping Reef.

"A vessel goin' on the rocks! A wreck!" The words were shrilled above the blasts of the tempest wind, as the mob dashed madly to the headland, the nearest land to the reef. Like rain came the spume of the breakers beating in on the rocky shore below.

Guided by lightning flashes, they ran, each knowing something portentous was happening out there in the wind and darkness and mountainous white-topped waves and scud—but maddened by the thought of their helplessness, a helplessness to aid whoever might be in danger that only a seacoast people can feel.

"There goes the signal gun agin!" screamed a woman in a high-pitched voice that carried above the crash of the elements. "Oh, where's Cap'n Tisdale? Don't he know they're signalin' him from the lightship—can't he hear?"

"What ye make her out to be, Caleb?" yelled

Captain Hen, as he ran with what speed his short fat legs would permit behind the bigger man.

"Kain't make her out," answered Captain Caleb between puffs. "She's a steamer and she's a-headin' in shore—straight toward the rocks—Ah, I could see her plain then—" as a sharper flash than the last lit up the turbulent sea. "By godfrey! What a night! What a night!" he groaned.

"And what a way to die," awesomely added Captain Hen, more to himself than to anyone else, as his eyes, too, made out the endangered craft as it wallowed in the trough of the sea, but a short distance beyond the reef—but too far for thought of aid from the mainland.

A thundering crash, and a woman's shrill scream.

"Oh, oh! What's the matter with her crew? Why don't they do somethin'?"

In the general jumble of voices that reached the two old captains as they ran into the midst of the excited mob—excited now for something far different than that which had spurred them on but a few moments before, came the futile calls for some one —any one—to do something.

Strange how the mood of human beings can change in so short a time! Within the last few minutes, there were those who had clamored for the overthrow—even the death—if need be, of a fellow-townswoman. Now, those same hearts were bleeding for other humans, totally unknown to them, who were at the mercy of far kinder elements than human passion.

"All hands to the beach!"

"Get out a boat!"

"Get all the men—"

"Where's Tisdale—"

"Get Tisdale!"

Orders there were, advice in plenty—but no one who seemed to know what to do in the crisis which only the hand of the Almighty could swing toward life or death for those battling against wind and wave which in its fury seemed taunting mere helpless humanity to take up a challenge.

"All hands to the beach! All hands to the beach!"

It was the general outcry above all the others; the shrieks of frightened women; their screams mingled with prayers as they fell on their knees with hands uplifted toward the black heavens split spasmodically by the keen cuts of lightning which showed the distant ship struggling in the seaway.

Above the tumult came the cry of Captain Hen again.

"She's goin' ter strike!" he cried. "Oh, what a way to die! What a night!"

"They're signaling out there for True Tisdale," howled Captain Caleb, making a megaphone of his huge hands the better for his smaller companion to hear him. "He'll hear, never fear—but what kin he do?"

His eyes swept out over the range of waters, the slash of rainswept surf and the turbulence of thunder, and the lightning—that made out the en-

dangered craft as clear as day for one instant, only to plunge it in black darkness the next. It lit up too, the huddled mob on the headland, the women in their bedraggled shawls, and the so'westers they wore like their husbands and brothers—their awe-stricken faces turned seaward or heavenward—the broken remains of the half-buried hulk that stood up out of the shore just beneath them, and partly in reach of the hungry breakers—the gloomy, desperate countenances of Captain Hen and Captain Caleb, who knew, perhaps better than any among them what it meant to be out there in that hellish sea.

Clambering down the stairway to the shore, and making his way to the tipmost top of the old wreck as though that height would give him a better vantage point, Captain Hen stood outlined in the next flash, a flash that made the tall cedar tree swaying above him at the top of the steps leading to the Tisdale's front yard, look like a slashing, menacing finger of evil pointing upward to the heavens. He brought out the old marine glass which he had hastily grabbed up from the Tisdale kitchen, and he focused it on the laboring vessel beyond the reef.

Captain Caleb, Ozra Hemingway and a half dozen others of the men, made their way after him and took shelter behind the hulk.

"What do you make her out?" called Captain Caleb anxiously, as the others, seeing the glass, pressed closer about the sturdy old man who held it.

"I think she's a freighter," he yelled, as he lowered his glass in the darkness between flashes, and howled above the crash of the accompanying

thunder. "How in God's name did she ever come ter get so clus' in on a lee shore in this storm?"

Once more he lifted his glasses, as Captain Caleb this time let out a groan, dashing back out of the way of a breaker, heavier than those preceding which drove the others rearward. "She hain't got a chance in a thousan'! Who is she, I wonder—"

Captain Hen shook his head. "Stranger in these parts. Kain't see how she missed th' lightship—kain't understand—"

"Her rudder must be jammed," offered Captain Caleb.

Lights from out to sea that shone different even in the lightning flashes brought out exclamations and lamentations from the people on the headland, according to their temperaments—red streaks against the black of night. Well they knew those signs, those Bayporters.

"The rockets!" cried a woman as she wrung her hands helplessly. "There go the rockets—"

Wildly, futilely, distressingly, the surging mob rushed about, many of them making their way down the rickety stairway, in their anxiety to be nearer the danger that awaited others, but were themselves so helpless to aid.

"Lord!" ejaculated Captain Hen, for the fourth time "what a time to be out there and helpless!"

"I could see her jest as plain as day then," screamed the hysterical voice of Mehitable Sands. "They want help—that True Tisdale—where is he! Oh, why don't somebuddy tell him to hurry—"

"They hain't got a chance—not a chance,"

mourned Captain Caleb— "They'll drown like rats, if she strikes, and how in time anybuddy's goin' ter—"

The whine of Ozra Hemingway broke in on his mental faculties for the first time. Not that Ozra's tongue had been idle—far from it—but Captain Caleb had been too much absorbed in watching the tragic scene spread before him in its setting of light flashes from black skies to pay any attention to the small man he had seen dumped so ignominiously before his neighbors into the storm but a few short minutes before.

"It's judgment," cried Ozra.

Captain Hen lowered his glass and in the next flash his face could be seen distorted with a scowl.

"Hold yer tongue, Oz Hemingway," he yelled. "Ye're in 'nough trouble for one day."

But though he had been so thoroughly cowed by the righteous indignation of a husband who defended his wife, the little man had no intention of subduing his belligerency for Captain Hen Berry. He wasn't afraid of him—at least not during the storm excitement. He thrust out his wizened little face, so that its smallest wrinkle was brought into prominence by the lightning.

"Why hain't the captain of the lightship here—I'm askin' ye that?" he jibed. "Trouble waitin' fer him and he—"

"There goes another gun!"

Shriller voices than Ozra's drowned out his criticism, but not even the elements could keep his rancid tongue quiet for long.

"My God," shouted Captain Caleb, using a more emphatic oath than common, as the lightning slashed about the doomed vessel, pounding itself on the reef. "She's struck!"

"Why don't th' crew of the lightship put out with a boat and help them?"

Ozra's face thrust itself so close to that of the big captain that Captain Caleb could smell the other's tobacco-laden breath before the drive of the furious wind could sweep it away.

"What's wrong with her captain, says I," he blatted.

"Damn you, keep quiet," Captain Caleb roared, but Ozra was not silenced.

"He'll answer to th' Gov'ment fer this," he prophesied with a wise wagging of his head under the so'wester he had had to tie under his chin to keep on.

To the watchers on the beach and on the headland above, it seemed that an eternity had passed since they had discovered the endangered vessel. In reality it had been so short a time that only a few minutes had elapsed between the firing of the first and last signal guns from the lightship.

Captain Caleb had been certain—so certain that he had not once even considered turning back into the Tisdale cottage to remind Trueman Tisdale of the signals or that duty awaited him. Captain Caleb was himself so assured of the folly of making any effort to go out in that wild sea from the mainland in the best open boat that was ever built that he had it in his heart to wish that Trueman might have been

still farther away, that he might have been spared the anguish of knowing that there were human beings who needed him and whom he could not help.

A shout went up from the bedraggled townspeople on the headland, though, as a new light appeared—a shaft which pierced the darkness from the opened front door of the Tisdale home.

Through its glow, Trueman Tisdale could be seen plunging down, down the little pathway and it was with a few bounds that he reached the stairway and thence down to bring up alongside the sunken wreck topped by the old mariner with the marine glasses.

A moment later Martha Tisdale was plainly in view as she looked out into the darkness. The door closed behind her quickly as she clapped on one of her husband's old hats and dashed out into the darkness to follow him.

The rest of the mob, emboldened by the temerity of the others, followed, and now all were assembled below on the rocky shore in the shelter of the old hulk.

Wordless, his lips drawn into the tight line that showed when the luminous electric flashes lit up the wild night, the lightship captain reached for Captain Hen's glasses. Understandingly and as wordless, the old man passed them over.

Only for the breath of a second that he waited for the next lightning stab, Trueman Tisdale stood atop the hulk, like the statue of a man carved from its wooden sides. But his keen eyes, trained to the big sweep of distances of the sea that was a big part

of his life, lost no iota of the peril of the vessel that had begun to pound itself to death on Ripping Reef. Save for a few subdued moans, the mutters of a prayer from hysterical women on their knees in the wet sand, no human sound broke above the crash of thunder and the roar of the surf. The watchers waited silently with bated breath for what Trueman Tisdale might do.

He did not keep them waiting. There was a gesture of determination in his every movement as he shoved the glasses back into Captain Hen's hands. He leapt down from the old wreck to stride through the pressing crowd. Unheeding he was of them as if they had been periwinkles in his path. His dory, which was still beached far up where he had shoved it the day before when he had come ashore, instead of taking it around into the little cove, was his objective. One hand was on its prow to drag it free when Captain Caleb, with surprising agility leapt after him.

"True, True!" he cried, wildly. "Where air ye goin', boy?"

Tisdale's hand swept toward the raging waters in the direction of the wrecked freighter, that could be seen only at intervals.

"Out there," he said shortly, between his tightly-clinched teeth. "Out there—where I belong."

"Ye kain't make hit, True—only a miracle will git ye past those breakers. Help's got ter come from offshore—the lightship—"

Determinedly, Trueman shook off the detaining hand.

"There'll be survivors," he spoke in bitten-off words. "I think I can see another steamer away out. They'll send a boat. And so will the lightship. But it's those who may be washed inside the reef I can help."

"Lad! Lad! Hit kain't be done!"

"I'm captain of that lightship," went on Trueman Tisdale, as if he had not been interrupted. It was in a grim voice. "There are humans out there who need me, and I'm going—"

Captain Hen had clambered down from the old hulk, under the lea of which Trueman Tisdale had hauled the dory. He added his urgings to those of his old clubmate, but to both, Trueman Tisdale turned his back as he gave the small boat another shove nearer the water.

Trueman paused briefly, and straightening his body, he looked for a moment toward the frightened faces of his townspeople. Once more he spoke, economical of his words.

"When there's been danger out there, there's always been a Tisdale to face it, I am not going to be the first to fail in my duty. Who volunteers to go with me?" There was something of scorn on his fine features outlined in the half light as he waited, but no word came.

Then it was Martha, his wife, who broke the spell, as she flung herself on him, crying, pleading, clutching at his coat.

"Oh, Trueman! Trueman!" she cried. "You must not! You must not! It's death—and I need you so—" Her voice died off into a moan, but gently her husband held her off as he looked deeply into her eyes.

"They need me, too, Martha—and I am going," he said firmly.

In the vivid flash of lightning that followed, the girl shrank back, but there was too much else for her to think of to notice the movement of shrinking away from contamination by her which was evidenced by the mob who a short time before had been seeking her—who had not forgotten their original purpose even in the stress of their new emotions.

Nor did she or her husband see the gaunt tall figure in flapping wet calico that suddenly outlined itself up above them, on the headland, near the tree that stood sentinel at the top of the Tisdale steps leading toward the house.

Miraculously, it seemed, Ma Tisdale had recovered from her severe illness. Not until she had reached the scene did Ma know that other matters had claimed the attention of her neighbors. She only knew that she could not bear the strain of remaining quietly in bed at Mehitable Sands' house while other Bayporters were getting for her the vengeance she craved from her stepdaughter-in-law.

She had decided she must know—must see what was going on—and she had arrived from her long wet journey down the River Road, just in time to be

a witness of the heroism of her step-son, whom she had hoped to humiliate.

But, though she had so hoped, there was a queer streak of affection in the heart of Ma Tisdale, no matter how she sought to hide it, as though it were a disgrace, and that one soft spot was for Trueman Tisdale. There had been not a little jealousy in her hatred of Martha, for until the younger woman had come to be mistress of the Tisdale home, Ma had looked on Trueman as her own son—her own to whom no other woman should lay claim.

Now, unnoticed, her old heart beating faster than it had in many a long day, Ma Tisdale saw him standing in the midst of the storm as he called for volunteers.

"Who'll go with me?" he asked once more, straight and tall as a viking who was used to breasting any storm. His lip curled at the silence.

Then a gasp went up from throats hoarse from hours of shrieks and screams as a small silent figure crossed the wet rocks and sand.

Straight and slim as the sapling on the heights of the beach above her—the tree under which Ma Tisdale stood and watched—and with her head held as proudly erect, Martha Tisdale took her stand beside her husband.

Her voice was not raised, but its determination carried above the roar of the elements. She spoke, not for the crowd, but to her husband.

"Where you go—I go!"

CHAPTER XXI

"YE'RE mad—mad!"

Captain Caleb's protest rang out, but it was only Captain Hen, standing near Ozra Hemingway, whose eyes showed his delight at the dramatic possibilities, who heard the little man say: "Why shouldn't she go?"

Up under the cedar, Ma Tisdale made her presence known by a long drawn cry as she wrung her hands helplessly.

"Oh, he'll be drowned," she howled, mournfully, "and all for no good. Kain't nobuddy stop him?"

But neither the protest of Ma Tisdale, nor the earnest pleadings of his two old captain friends budged Trueman Tisdale for one instant in his purpose. His hands pushed the dory to the edge of the water. His eyes sought Martha's.

"Get aboard," he said, and then to Captain Caleb who made one last frantic appeal—but his searching gaze took in the entire mob who pressed forward as close to the breakers as they dared. "I am answering for what I do! Look out for yourselves! We're off!"

The situation was too tense for words. There was heard but the roar of the storm as Trueman Tisdale steadied his dory for one second, and leapt into

it as he gauged a wave, and the small craft shot out past its shelter into the breakers, its occupants half hidden by the spume that sprayed up about them.

Good sailor that she was since childhood, Martha Tisdale sat in the stern with the steering oar as the boat shot ahead, driven with all the brawn of the sinewy arms of her husband. Trueman Tisdale was rowing with the strength of a Hercules.

Back on the beach, Captain Hen, once more on the hulk with his glasses, let up a shout as the lightning revealed that the small boat had cleared the outer edge of the breakers. A wild cheer answered him as he called the news. Captain Caleb bared his head to the rain and storm and whispered tensely: "God guide them!"

There was a wilder burst of wind, and a more lurid flash of lightning, enabling the waiting ones ashore to see that the freighter was still holding, but that it was a matter of moments before she should go to pieces or slide off into deeper water on the inside of the reef.

Oh, if Trueman Tisdale should make it, after all! More women dropped to their knees with voices uplifted in prayer, and further back, the quavering voice of old Mrs. Barzum took up a wailing prayer song in which one after another joined.

A groan from Captain Hen, and then his voice broke.

"What is it, man, what is it?" Captain Caleb strained forward in his excitement. Captain Hen

shook his head as he held the glass limply at his side.

"A wave," he choked, "as big as a mountain, and —and I kain't see them—I kain't look—"

But his voice and hope came back to him as a great shout went up from the big captain who had taken the glasses from him.

"Glory be!" shouted Captain Caleb. "They've ridden! They've ridden it!—I can see 'em! They've ridden it out!"

"They kain't keep it up—there hain't no sense in hopin'," Ozra Hemingway, too long out of the limelight, put in his pessimistic voice. "There hain't a livin' bein' can live in such a sea, let alone a boat—" But he was stopped by the snarl of Jonas Sands—Jonas, his whole ideas of the hour before switched about by the courageous action of the woman the tongues of this little man beside him and of some of the women who were now on their knees in prayer had led him to condemn.

"They're a-lastin'," said Jonas.

"She'll kill him! She'll kill him!" came Ma Tisdale's scream above the hubbub. She was now at the top of the stairway. "What does she know about a boat in such a sea? Oh, save him, somebuddy, save him!"

Then came a greater crash of thunder and a lightning flash that seemed to split the universe—a pandemonium of sound that stopped Ma Tisdale's high-pitched shrieks as the electric bolt shot straight through the tree under which she had stood but the

moment before and from which she had fled toward the beach just in time. The tree was cleft in its middle.

Wet, frightened watchers scrambled wildly away for safety as the gaunt cedar came crashing down on the beach, its limbs aflame with an uncanny light, the unearthly gleam from its burning branches throwing a sickly glare up the whole stretch of beach; its sulphurous odor wafting out over the tang of wet sea and skies.

"It's a judgment!" Ma Tisdale groaned, as she collapsed in a wet bundle on the wetter ground. "God have mercy on their souls!" There was no thought of her own miraculous escape from death from the lightning bolt.

"Some of ye wimmin go and 'tend her." Captain Hen cried, and then ran toward Captain Caleb who had called out that Trueman and Martha had reached inside the reef near the wrecked vessel.

And it was by superhuman efforts that the man and woman had driven their small boat through the mountainous waves, up on their crest at one moment, to be thrown into a watery valley the next, but ever on! On! Until they had brought up as near the rocks and the wrecked ship as the angry waters would permit.

Then Trueman Tisdale could see that Captain Hen had been right—that the vessel was a freighter whose identity was unknown to them. And in that first glance, there escaped from the throats of both him and Martha a deep groan. It looked as though

their efforts had been in vain, for not one living soul could be seen on that wreck that was dashing itself to pieces on the flinty rocks!

Near the wreck as he was, Trueman Tisdale knew its character, and was not therefore surprised that there were not passengers hanging on to the splintering craft or lashing about in the sea. For such a freighter, he knew, carried only a small crew, and in such a crisis, it was more or less each man look out for himself. There must be someone about, he thought quickly—on spars, on broken beams—somewhere. Eagerly he scanned the darkling sea.

A form floated by, clinging with a death grip to a bit of wreckage. Then it was that Trueman Tisdale, leaving the management of his boat to the woman who was his sole life-saving crew, reached out over the side of the dory, all but toppling over the frail craft, and dragged in the human derelict whom he laid face down in the boat, sodden and still.

Not another survivor was in sight.

It was not till he had made sure of this, though, that he thought of turning about, and it was when he veered sadly shoreward, that he discovered two limp bodies in the bottom of his dory. For Martha Tisdale, his courageous young wife, had fallen in a dead faint! With pounding heartbeats he saw her, but there was no chance to lift her up—to care for her! Poor girl! The strain had been too much. Perhaps he should not have let her come, but—His heart whispered to him even as he battled with

the waves—repeated the words she had uttered: "Where you go, I go!"

Ashore, Captain Caleb, with the glasses, saw their newer, greater danger even before Trueman saw it himself. He had watched the rescue and had told the awed villagers, but he saw more—the wreck going to pieces—the danger.

"Pull, man, pull!" he roared, as though his voice would carry out there through the breakers. "She'll catch you with one of her timbers!"

"Pull! Pull! Pull!" His big old arms worked like flails as he sought to help Trueman Tisdale. He was not alone, for the crowd, hysterical in their tension, were working as hard as though each held an oar. They knew that Trueman Tisdale had made one rescue, and now he must come back. God would not let him fail at this late hour! Voices raised higher in prayer—hysterical wails added to the tumult.

Captain Caleb's blue eyes glistened as he turned to Ozra Hemingway.

"They're comin' back!" he declared. "Now what ye got to say?"

"They hain't back yet," Ozra refused to admit anything. "I'm tellin' ye it's the judgment of God for what she's done. They won't ever come back."

Furiously Captain Caleb grasped the coat of Ozra Hemingway, his muscular arm flexed, and for the second time that night the small man's body was shaken till his false teeth rattled.

"And I'm tellin' ye," shouted the captain, "that

yer soul is nearer th' gates of Hell than hit ever was before. Ye'll be findin' that out, Ozra Hemingway."

"They're headin' for shore, comin' afore th' wind!" Captain Hen danced on the wreck as he watched and gave out the bulletins his glass flashed him through the lightning illumined night. "Lord, how he handles them oars! What a man! He's drivin' her straight as an arrow fer—"

The glasses dropped with a crash into the sand, as his hands went up to his face to hide the sight he had witnessed, as his voice quavered with the horror he could not suppress.

"Hen! Hen! What is hit?" cried Captain Caleb as he jumped forward for the fallen glasses, the only means they had to know what was going on out there in the tumultuous sea. "What is it, man?"

But the rubicund old man had sat down wearily on a rotting spar, all life, all hope gone for him. His voice was still and awed as he answered: "Martha! She's—she's gone!"

"It kain't be! It kain't be! The Maker wouldn't let hit be," mourned Captain Caleb, as he brought the glasses up, but not before Ozra, at his side, had time to announce maliciously: "What did I tell yer—they won't come back—God's done it!"

"Then if He has, I'm losin' my faith in Him, and I hain't expectin' that!" shot out the other.

But no further notice did he take of the maligner. His eyes were glued to the lenses through which he could see Trueman Tisdale's boat hitting Gut Rapids and running them. Trueman Tisdale was, in fact,

rowing like a madman, but with the skill of a trained oarsman. Into the outer breakers, coming head-on for the beach, his dory shot unswervingly, and the light from the burning tree showed the stout little craft topping them.

It was the signal for the men ashore, those who had not had the courage to go into that raging sea to assume command—to try to do something. Commands came then from all sides. All were willing to do that.

"Stand ready to help when he lands!"

"Lend a hand there!"

"Be ready to take the bow!"

"Damn the boat—get True Tisdale, and the man he got!"

"Stand back and when she lands don't rush him!"

But it was Captain Caleb who assumed the final command, as in the days of his actual seagoing. The dory was almost upon them. One more breaker to breast and—land!

"Be ready now," he roared to the men who crowded forward in their eagerness. "Every man of ye to his job! You wimmin stand back—Look out—ready, every one of ye! She's comin'!"

And lightly as a gull that perches on the mast of a ship on a sunshiny day, Trueman Tisdale's dory dipped over the last breaker into the lee of the old hulk again, to have its bow seized by a dozen willing hands who dragged it clear of the seething backdrag.

Other willing hands went out toward the exhausted man whose super-courage had performed a

miracle of rescue work, but they were pushed aside by Trueman Tisdale himself, who jumped from the boat, to reach down and lift out tenderly the limp figure of his wife. A long-drawn series of sighs like a chorus greeted him. It seemed incredible to those who had believed that Martha Tisdale was somewhere out there in the dark sea, to find her safe.

Trueman spoke tersely.

"Someone look after her—she's fainted! We must bring this man around!"

There were some willing feminine hands in that mob—some who had condemned her—who now reached out for Martha Tisdale and began their first-aid, as her husband, taking charge of his own rescue work, worked with a skill born of experience, with the help of others whom he commanded, to bring back to life the man he had dragged from the sea.

"Move his arms! Lay him on his face! Someone get a lantern up at the house!" he ordered. "Faster! Faster, man," to Jonas Sands, who was pumping up and down the arms of the half-drowned man. And then he pushed aside the man who was astride the sea's victim and himself fell to with all the energy at his command to bring back life.

Captain Hen shook his head sadly.

"It's no use, True," he said. "And after all ye've done!"

Savagely the rescuer turned.

"There's a chance, I tell you!" he snapped. "His arms—bend 'em—up—down, harder—harder!"

A slight groan from the man in the sand rewarded him. Trueman Tisdale lifted himself wearily, but by the lantern light there could be seen the exultation of accomplishment in his eyes.

"He's alive!" he said triumphantly.

And from the awed lips of the crowd came the repetition: "He's alive! Alive!"

For just one moment Trueman Tisdale allowed himself to glance at his wife—into whose face the color was returning under the ministrations of the women who had taken her in charge—as he gave over the further work of first-aid to the other men. Stern as he was in duty, though, it was the rescued man who was his first thought. He bent over him.

"Here," he ordered. "Hold the light, someone—" and Ozra Hemingway, ever officious, held up the lantern. "Now some of you, help me turn him over."

Another groan, more indicative of returning life than any that had preceded it, came from the almost drowned man as willing hands turned him over with his face toward the dark sky. Eagerly Ozra Hemingway swung the lantern above that face. And—lover of dramatics as he was—even Ozra Hemingway was for once overcome by what he saw. His breath came in quick jerks as he spoke awedly:

"It's NATE SANDERSON!"

Trueman Tisdale whirled around to seize the lantern from the little man's hands. He peered down into the face of the man he had saved. And his nails cut into the flesh of his hands as the lantern dropped

to the sand, the lighted wick to flicker there, as he raised himself erect, repeating, like one in a dream:

"Nate Sanderson! HIM!"

"He's still breathing," Captain Hen, working the man's arms, looked up to eagerly speak. "There's a chance to bring him 'round."

Faster than ever he resumed his operations, but the crowd which had closed in at the announcement of the rescued man's identity were too wrought up by the eventful news to heed the orders to fall back.

Trueman Tisdale stood statute-like in his wet garments as his gaze wandered to the raging sea, lit up less frequently now by the flashes of lightning from the storm that seemed to have expended its fury when it had dashed that freighter to pieces on the reef. Though he spoke half aloud, his words were to himself.

"And of all those poor devils out there, it had to be him!"

An exclamation from Captain Caleb as Sanderson's eyelids flickered.

"He's comin' 'round!"

But Trueman did not hear.

"And I brought him in—"

Ozra Hemingway turned away disgustedly.

"There hain't no call to save his sort of man," he droned righteously.

"I saved him—" went on Trueman Tisdale, still unheeding all but his own thoughts. But the words of Ozra Hemingway broke into his consciousness without his volition.

"For HER!" Ozra sneered, and then with his gnarled little hands on both hips, it being impossible for the time for him to snap his suspenders which were safe under his tightly fastened slicker, he pushed his wizened face up as far as he could to demand of the man he faced: "What are ye goin' ter do, True Tisdale?"

As he might have brushed aside an annoying insect, the big lightship captain brushed his tormenter aside, as he went on. His thoughts, his mental processes, for the time being, were all for himself, but his words were spoken aloud.

"It wasn't meant that I should take him from the sea and cast him back again," he half whispered, as his gaze rested on the upturned face of the man over whom the others were still working furiously and with ever and ever increasing chances of success.

"It wasn't meant for me to do that. Fate sent me out there! Fate sent him to me! There's a meaning in it!"

"What are ye goin' ter 'do, True Tisdale, I ask ye?"

Ozra Hemingway had no notion of giving up his advantage. Not even as he saw Martha Tisdale struggle to her feet and stand for a moment looking as dazedly as her husband at the scene before her—that scene lighted by the blaze of the burning cedar and the dull glow of the inadequate lantern. She shuddered as though at some gruesome spectacle.

"Then—it was—him!" she whispered, as she half

tottered forward. "I saw him—for one moment, out there in the dark, and then—"

"What are ye goin' ter do, True Tisdale?"

Ozra's question, repeated for the third time, took on a menace. But Trueman Tisdale was not hearing. As he stood in the darkness, in the dying storm he had breasted, he was fighting another battle—a battle with himself. His problem was not for consultation with such as Ozra Hemingway. He brought up with a start, though, as Martha flung herself on him.

"Trueman!" she cried, her heart in her voice. But still he did not answer.

From the man on the sand slowly recovering his senses, Captain Caleb rose and came to Tisdale on whose taut arm he placed a sympathetic hand.

"True!" he said gently.

"Oh, True—my husband," Martha's cry pierced through the haze of the man's consciousness as no other sound had done. There was a break in her voice—a sob, half hysterical. "Oh, Trueman, you —we—can't let him die—now!"

One moment more Trueman Tisdale's figure stood as rigid as a spar. One moment more he gave to his battle. Then his arms relaxed, his figure sagged. Wearily he pushed aside those who sought to comfort him, to give advice—or aid. Three steps he took to the side of the man who lay in the sand. He looked down at him with strange eyes.

Then he bent over and picked up the still uncon-

scious, but heavy breathing sailor and threw him across his shoulder.

"Bring the lantern," he commanded to Martha, unnoticing the others, as he trudged off up the beach toward the wet steps that led to the highland and his lighted cottage.

Gasps went up from the crowd that watched. It was Ozra Hemingway who broke the tension.

"He's taking him home, the fool! He's taking him home!"

CHAPTER XXII

IN some ways, the life of Martha Tisdale in Bayport, after the courageous rescue of Nate Sanderson by her husband and herself, was a bit easier. In other ways it was harder—far harder. And the pendulum swung to the wrong side with greater and greater rapidity as the days went by—the days on which Sanderson lay in her house, and during which, at her husband's command, she nursed him.

Now there were more of the men of the town—those who knew, recognized and rewarded courage—and a few of the women who were for letting by-gones be by-gones and giving the girl a chance to prove herself. Maybe, after all, she had not done all the things they had thought she had. Trueman Tisdale had been pretty mum about that Boston trip of his, and surely, if he had found anything really wrong, he would not have brought his wife back. Perhaps—

Something Mrs. Anastasia Fish said in the Neptune Club one day, when she had been there finishing up some of her arrangements for a fortnightly fish supper, illustrated how the kinder element took things—but on the other hand, there were words and words and ever increasing words of Ma Tisdale,

Mehitable Sands, Ozra Hemingway, as leaders and other irreconcilables to combat.

Captain Hen Berry had dropped into the club rooms and was idling away the time before he should go over to the post office for the noon mail, by watching Captain Lem and Captain Tony at their important checker game, while Mrs. Fish went about the clearing up that the old members were by this time beginning to look upon rather as an evil they could not combat than as the annoyance it had once been. They were not even particularly noticing Mrs. Fish's own annoyance, until she suddenly asked them, in a voice as peevish as any her cheerful self ever used:

"Any of ye seen that Caleb? Here he was a-promisin' ter come over an' help me, but I s'pose he's busy as usual. Humph! Fallin' all over my heels when I don't want him and mighty certain ter be missin' when I do."

Captain Hen only grinned as the buxom lady flounced about her duties, but as though her wanting her husband had been the signal for his appearance, it was the jovial face of the huge captain that showed as the door banged open. His countenance took on a look of humility when he sighted his wife.

"Jest saw Ma Tisdale up the street," he informed, hesitatingly, "and she was lookin' for ye—says she wants a special meetin' of the auxil'ry right away to settle Martha. She's still harpin' on that subject—says things have gone far 'nough—"

Mrs. Fish sniffed as she viciously wiped a large

dust rag across the roughly polished surface of the long table that had for many years seen cabin duty on board an old-time brigantine.

"Humph! Ma Tisdale's some strong on wantin', ain't she?" was her comment.

Captain Hen grinned a wry smile as he sunk his teeth into a fresh plug of tobacco. "Got th' world's record, I 'low, Mis' Fish," he said.

But Mrs. Fish went on. It was plain to see by the way she attacked her cleaning that something was in her mind that must come out. It was not usually the way with this spouse of the big captain's to take the men of the Neptune Club, the older men especially, on whom she looked as children who must be tended and humored, into her confidence. But now her lips shut grimly as she stood still, the cleaning rag dangling idle in her hand for a moment.

"I 'low you men know Ma Tisdale's still determined ter drive Martha out of town?" she asked grimly. "Now she's canvassin' the members of the auxil'ry—goin' from house to house. I've got half a mind to get out of hit."

Old Captain Tony stopped right in the middle of an important move to look up eagerly—Captain Tony, who never took much part in any town controversies.

"No sense in stoppin' half way, Mis' Fish," he told her, and went back to his game.

Mrs. Fish placed her capable hands on her capacious hips as she faced the club members. "Only said I'd half a mind ter," she declared. "But I

ain't goin' ter. 'Low there's plenty to keep me here now. Mebby there's some regular folks in this auxil'ry, but not 'nough of 'em. I'm in favor of purity, sanctity and a god-like life just as much as anybuddy else, but I call what's bein' done to Martha Tisdale downright persecution! Humph! There they are a-cacklin' an' a-cacklin' and all the time Martha ain't done no more'n she's been told to do. True brung Nate Sanderson to their house: True told her to nurse him. She's done it, the best she knows how, but that's all she's done—"

Mrs. Fish's oration was stopped directly in the middle by the surprising action of her husband. Before she could even divine his purpose, he had clasped her big body to his own huge one and given her a resounding smack on her round pink cheek.

"'Stasia," he enthused, "By godfrey! you're actually *human*." A clip on his ear from his spouse answered him, but he still clung to her as he turned to wink a broad wink toward the grinning men. "There, now," he asked triumphantly, "didn't I say she was plumb human?"

Mrs. Fish wriggled loose from him, a bit embarrassed. But she was not as altogether displeased as her sour tone would imply as she asked: "What did ye think I was—a toad? Ye're a fool, Caleb Fish!"

"Mebby I am, 'Stasia, mebby I am," Captain Caleb's head wagged, "but it's worth bein' told hit to hear ye talkin' that way."

And well might those who, unquestioning taking

her and her husband at their face value, were still upholders of Martha Tisdale, be glad at one kindly word spoken in her behalf. There were not many of them. In spite of the somewhat grudging tribute to her courage which the post office gatherings were willing to give, she had not ceased to be the chief topic of their gossip.

Strangely enough, too, there were those who blamed her principally for the presence in the Tisdale home of Nate Sanderson—notwithstanding the fact that she was caring for the man at her husband's orders, and that Trueman himself had taken him there. They could know nothing, either of the understanding between husband and wife—the scenes that had been staged in the small kitchen of the Tisdale home when Martha had pleaded, argued, reasoned, all to no avail—that Trueman send Sanderson away.

"No, Martha," he had said, and his eyes had looked straight into her own—bored into her soul. "You've wanted your chance—now you have it. You wanted to show Bayport that you were to be trusted, that you cared only for your husband—now you can do it. It is your battle—and you must win it alone."

And Trueman Tisdale had again gone back to his lightship, leaving his weeping wife who felt more friendless than ever before in her life, but with a greater love for her husband, though she now believed it more futile than ever. She had pretended that she did not even notice that Trueman went away without his usual kiss, but she had not let him see

her lips brush his coat sleeve as his back was turned.

Martha Tisdale indeed had to fight her battle alone, for although Trueman had prevailed on Mrs. Lou Barzum's granny to come and stay in the Tisdale home—Granny was past the age where gossip or anything else save a warm place to sit and enough tea made any difference to her—she might as well have been alone with the man whose smirks even while he lay in bed and let her minister to him, were anathema.

Too late she had learned why Nate Sanderson had prevailed on her to go to Boston in his company, promising to find her father—a promise she knew now he could not have kept because he knew nothing whatever about her father; too late she knew him for the kind of man he was. As she went about her nursing, doing her husband's bidding, she tried to still the bitter hatred of him—hatred that was all the greater when she reasoned that because of him she could never hope to hold the husband she adored. She could not know the prayer that was in Trueman Tisdale's heart as he stood beside his dory, down in the cove, before he shoved off—looking back at the home he had quitted, now bright once more after the storm, and its setting giving promise of the flush grandeur of approaching autumn.

"God, I pray Thee," murmured Trueman, head bared, "let her make her battle—let her win!"

And so it was that all that had happened before in the affairs of the Tisdales and Sanderson were of

minor importance as groundwork for gossip in Bayport compared to the situation that now existed. Scarcely anything else was of sufficient importance to discuss at all.

Only the most loyal friends of Trueman Tisdale, and those almost exclusively the older members of the Neptune Club, could find anything to say in defense of his action in keeping Sanderson in his home. As for Martha herself, a few visits up the River Road into town in an effort to escape the hateful atmosphere in which Sanderson was, were enough for her. In the street, she was cut dead, or treated with open scorn even by those who before had had a trifle of sympathy for her.

True to her word never to step inside the Tisdale home as long as Martha was mistress there, Ma Tisdale had been having the time of her life at first, "visitin' 'round," but as she, too, noticed that her welcome in various places was wearing itself out a bit—especially as any news she had to convey was only old news that they all knew—she had come to see that if she was ever to again preside over the Tisdale cottage she must waste no time in her purpose of getting Martha out of the town, once and for all.

She knew how useless it would be to appeal to Trueman. He was too big a fool, she said, too taken in by a pretty face, just as all men were, to see sense. So what she intended doing, she gave it out, was as much for his own good as for hers.

She was in her most belligerent mood on the morn-

ing she dropped into the Neptune Club, intent on finding Mrs. Fish, on the same morning and but a few minutes after that worthy lady had announced her opinions in no uncertain terms to the club members, thereby gaining the encomiums and a kiss from her husband. In his mild manner of always being placating, it was Captain Hen who first greeted Ma as she bounced into the club where Mrs. Anastasia Fish was suddenly once more busy with her dust rag.

"Mornin', Mis' Tisdale," he offered mildly.

"Mornin'!" Ma Tisdale's word snapped out, but she wasted no more time on the men. She strode over to Mrs. Fish, busy straightening the pictures on the wall.

"I've been lookin' for you," she said firmly. "There's goin' to be a special meetin' of the auxil'ry to-night. Ten members has signed this petition," as she flourished a paper before the other's nose, "callin' for it. Hope ye'll be there."

"I can't help a-thinkin' that—" the other began, only to be caught up short by the determined sharp-nosed woman who had addressed her.

"Save yer thinkin' for the meetin', Anastasia Fish," she snorted disdainfully. "Say what's on yer mind there—if ye've got the courage to!" She turned to look sharply through her square-framed glasses at the assembled men members of the club. "And there won't be any men there, either," she affirmed shortly.

Captain Hen scratched thoughtfully at his thin grizzled head. "Don't know as I'm jest crazy about

bein' there, judgin' from the weather signals," he admitted.

"Does look like a busy evenin' ahead," Captain Caleb muttered contemplatively as he saw the glowering looks Ma Tisdale cast in his direction, but for once in his life he was not dismayed by them. He went on bravely: "You're a blamin' Martha for nursin' Nate Sanderson, but ye're forgettin' True asked her ter nurse him."

Ma's sniff all but upset her glasses as she came back: "If Trueman's a fool, I ain't. I know what her nursin' him, an' him a-smilin' up at her like Granny Barzum says, means. An' I know what it's all a-leadin' up ter. Whatever folks may be a-thinkin' of me, they know I'm decent!"

Captain Hen spat viciously at the painted cuspidor, and for once in his life, missed it.

"Anyone provin' that Martha ain't?" he shouted, with outthrust chin, and then before Ma Tisdale could gain her breath for another onslaught he stopped her with uplifted hand as he added, with a world of meaning: "Oh, I know well enough what they're sayin'. You kain't tell me, but what I'm askin' is—is any one provin' it?"

Ma Tisdale's narrow shoulders shook with anger at this heresy, but she found voice to answer in the captious tone she always employed with these men whose club rights she and her kind had usurped, and whose lives she had made but slightly less miserable than the girl wife she was bent on hectoring.

"When the time comes we'll prove all that's

needed. She's goin' to be voted down in the auxil'ry; then she's goin' to be thrown out of my house—Trueman or no Trueman." Ma Tisdale's voice rose to a shout as the infuriated woman pronounced her ultimatum in the face of this, the only opposition she had encountered in a day's canvassing.

She breathed a sigh of relief as Ozra Hemingway slithered through the doorway. Here at least, was an ally, even if one of the hated species of masculinity. But then, Ozra wasn't much of a man. His presence, however, gave her courage to add, with a hateful sneer: "Then we'll see where she heads with her lover!"

Mrs. Anastasia Fish dropped her cleaning rag and turned squarely around.

"I wouldn't be sayin' that," she reproved sternly.

"Wal, I have—and I mean it!" Ma stopped for lack of breath.

Mrs. Fish continued calmly. "Once before," she said, "I called hit to yer attention that Martha may have been foolish and done wrong—but as I told ye then, who hasn't sometime or other. But what I said then, goes just as strong now—stronger, seein' how unfair some folks are to her after all she's done. I'm goin' to treat Martha decent, and that's flat!"

Ozra Hemingway, long enough out of things, decided it time for his contribution.

"See Sistare's back," he said almost too casually, "likely means True'll be comin' ashore to-night—

but," and he nodded to Ma Tisdale, "we'll be havin' the meetin' jest the same?"

Captain Hen's broad countenance, registering as much of a sneer as its rubicundity would permit, permitted him one ejaculation toward the back of Ma Tisdale as she set sail for the doorway with all the dignity that her angularity would allow: "Thought ye said there wouldn't be any men at that meetin,' Mis Tisdale," he remarked, but as his faded blue eyes glared balefully at Ozra who trailed after her, he added, "I 'low ye were right, for onct."

"Are ye goin', 'Stasia?" Caleb Fish's utterance was as much of a whisper as his weather-toned vocals would permit as the door banged behind Ma Tisdale and her ally, and he addressed his question to his frowning wife. She dusted her hands with the gesture of a task completed as she whisked on her bonnet. Her eyes snapped, and her big roly-poly figure quivered with a new dignity as she turned to him.

"After that?" she exploded, "course I am! I'm a Tinker, and no one ever shoved too much down a Tinker's throat—not even you. What's more, I'm goin' ter stir up a few more what has ter learn they can breathe without askin' Ma Tisdale. An' ye mind my words, Caleb Fish," and her tightened fist shook at him as though her husband had done her an unendurable injury, "if ye let me weaken at the last minnit ter save Martha Tisdale then our twenty years of married bliss will end in a crash. I'm goin' now," and as she took his arm in a no uncertain grip

she added, "so are you. Ye're goin' ter spend the rest of the day helpin' me get the strength ter do the right thing!"

Mrs. Anastasia Fish didn't have to drag her husband to the door of the Neptune Club. For once he was eager to leave with her—and proud. The broad grin on his face as he meekly followed her, with one glance around at his clubmates, was significant.

"By godfrey, Hen," he confided, "ye don't know what you've missed after all by not bein' married—" he began, but his wife stopped him with: "Some poor woman's missed a heap of trouble." Still unnoticing her, he finished jubilantly, before she dragged him through the doorway: "If I was single, an' she was, I'd marry her all over—jest for this—"

Captain Hen allowed himself one final remark, before he immersed himself in the intricacies of the checker game that had been so abruptly halted—as were so many of the doings of the old members of the Neptune Club since the women had pirated the ship—

"True's mighty queer—in his steering," he said, thoughtfully, "can't see why he don't leave that infernal lightship alone long enough to teach 'em somethin'—"

Captain Tony hesitatingly moved a black king, after thought that might have been given over the drafting of a world-significant treaty. He shifted his cud to the side of his face that it might not interfere with his enunciation.

"Seen Martha settin' on the dock a day or so ago waitin' for True to come ashore. He didn't come—she didn't know then like we know now that True was doin' Jed Sistare's trick so's Jed could go to Harwich to see his sick wife."

The stubby, work-hardened, sea-air toughened fingers of Captain Hen clawed slowly at his fringe of whiskers. His head wagged sagely; his eyes were on a distant scene; he spoke half to himself:

"True's got a wife that's mighty sick herself—mighty sick—breakin' her heart for him."

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR all their conjecturing, it was hard for Bayporters to decide just what was Nate Sanderson's reaction to the situation into which Fate had flung him by way of a turbulent storm and treacherous sea. Bayporters may have had their faults, but they had no way of estimating just such a man as Nate Sanderson. He was out of their category. There may have been rotters among them, but not just such as he—so the gossip that flew about did not much take Nate Sanderson into consideration, save for a few who condoned him because he did not hesitate to take the gifts the gods provided.

For a time, Sanderson himself was puzzled. He was recovering rapidly, under the conscientious treatment he was receiving at Martha's hands, with no idea whatever that she was pleading on every occasion on which she saw her husband for him to send the man away to a hospital—to come ashore and be with her himself. Always Trueman Tisdale shook his head in that all-conclusive way she had come so well to know.

"Not yet, Girl—not yet!" was the easiest way he put it. "Not yet—things are coming around all right."

Trueman Tisdale had had a bed brought down

from up-stairs and placed in his best room for the man whom Fate had sent for him to bring back to life. And so as the days went by, and Nate Sanderson grew in strength in the Tisdale "sittin' room," with its haircloth furniture, its old pictures of dead and gone Tisdales—its piano which Martha never glanced at without her soul remembering that Dorothy had sung to her—

> "I shall love thee, dear, forever,
> Though the years shall pass away—"

She shuddered as she saw the satanically complacent, good-looking face of Sanderson, there among her best pillows, contaminating even her memories—

Nate Sanderson had had time for thinking. Martha, it was true, had assumed the attitude toward him of a professionally trained nurse, of an automaton whose only interest in him was in that of a "case," in whom she had no personal interest whatever. But Nate Sanderson, watching her, imbued with a conceit so overwhelming that he believed the very elements were in league with him to perpetuate his impossible existence, laughed with throat and eyes, and waited. Martha was interested in him—of course she was! How could she help it! Why else the tender consideration?

Once, on a day when he was feeling especially fit, but before Doctor Seward had said that he might get up, Sanderson thought it time to begin. He tried

to possess himself of one of Martha's hands as she held the tray for him to take his lunch—dinner, they called it in Bayport, but Martha was following doctor's orders.

"Martha," he said, "I've always heard that women were angels, but—there are so few—angels!"

One moment he tried to look soulfully into her eyes, only to find them averted, and not averted as might have been the case with one impressed. The red blood that showed at the nape of her neck was illuminative. Perhaps it was not the time to say much to her. Perhaps an invalid was not all that he had ever heard they might be in the way of gaining a woman's affections.

Nate Sanderson's glimpse of himself in the long mirror that had been brought from China a long time ago to be put up in the Tisdale parlor, showed him that he was really not the romantic specimen he felt himself to be. But Nate Sanderson smiled; he could wait. And he had no compunction in dreaming as his eyes wandered out through the Tisdale windows over the water toward the lightship in the distance—the same vista which had claimed Martha so many times in the days when she had believed that troubles were past.

As Nate Sanderson grew stronger, his conceit grew greater. He had run across one thing in his life he could not understand. Martha Tisdale seemed actually to have a feeling of repulsion toward him. It was something new in his lexicon—

he who had prided himself his whole life that his charms were such that no woman could withstand him. He thought it over carefully that first day he was out on the Tisdale porch, with the sunlight streaming in reflections from the sea that had recently all but overcome him, over the little porch with its homey appearance, with Martha's hammock which he had scorned with a strong man's humor to laughingly place himself in a splint-bottomed chair. What was the reason? The answer seemed to come to him in a flash. Why, Martha was shamming! She was playing a part! How better could she have played it than by piquing him as she had during the days she would not so much as let him touch her hand. She must be piqued herself because he made no further effort to win her since that time in Boston.

Women were all alike, he laughed—they wanted what he had heard called, and had seen as "cave man stuff" in the movies he frequented when away from this slow town of Bayport. He had given up too easily. Well, it shouldn't happen again. The winning of Martha—she whom he had thought so nearly won once before, was merely a matter of technique, a matter of time.

Strange as it may seem, during all Sanderson's illness which was no more than the recuperation of a strong man from the shock of exhaustion and extreme peril, he had not seen Trueman Tisdale. He had not at first thought this strange, but as the days went by, he had come to believe that the man's continued absence argued in his favor. Trueman

could not care much about Martha. Why, otherwise, leave her alone—and at the mercy of one so invincible as he—Sanderson?

The way seemed open to him, even as he sat at the window in his low chair and allowed Martha to wait on him, a man who in his heart knew that, after the ten days he had spent in the Tisdale home, he was as fit as any mate who ever sailed a freighter from Boston, or any other port. Sanderson had not shown any interest in the other men of the crew of the ill-fated steamer, much to Martha's horror.

"Captain's fault," unsympathetically said Sanderson, when he was questioned. "Not my watch. I was asleep when we lost our headway—everybody excited—but probably no great loss. She didn't carry a crew of more than fourteen men, and there wasn't a passenger on board—all too afraid of the threatening weather. But why worry," remarking the revulsion on Martha's face, as she listened to this quiz and answers—Dr. Seward had taken time to ask the questions—later he would be interrogated by the United States Commissioners. "Maybe some of 'em'll be picked up at sea or somewhere—they were not a lot to get lost without a struggle. Look at me."

But Martha Tisdale had not the heart to laugh with him. If she had thought Nate Sanderson heartless before—in her own case—she knew him to be doubly so now. In Boston, when she had found that he knew nothing of her father—and after that one long look out of that cheap lodging house window

at the women she saw parading the streets—she remembered the shudder as she had pictured herself one of them before Trueman had so miraculously opened the door and come for her.

It is a hard thing for one of Martha's age, inured as she was to the pain that one human being can give to another, to believe that there could still exist so hardened a human being as this one who laughed at the probable fate of another. She remembered her own reactions when she was out there in the tumbling black seas, guided by the lightning flashes toward some one she had never known, never seen, only known must be a human in distress.

The patience of Trueman Tisdale's wife with her unwanted, unasked guest, he whom she knew was perfectly able to be about and doing for himself on the tenth day of his stay, was about exhausted. She wondered what she could do. Trueman surely must be coming ashore soon, and then she would ask—no, *demand*—that he take Nate Sanderson away. She was in the kitchen preparing the tea for Granny Barzum when she heard the faint footfalls that she knew were not Granny's. She faced about, teapot in hand. Nate Sanderson stood in the doorway, grinning at her, in what, no doubt he believed to be a fascinating fashion.

"Hello, Sweets," he greeted. "Tea, eh? 'T'would be different, if you and I were in Boston again—*when* we are in Boston again, I should say," he amended.

Martha pretended not to notice him as she whirled

to the stove and viciously shoved another piece of wood under the already highly burning embers. Nate Sanderson came closer; his voice was wheedling.

"What's the use of playing off any longer, Chick?" he begged. "You've had me on the pan long enough. You know what you think of me—so do I, and—"

It had come—the thing that Martha had dreaded—the thing she had been warding off ever since Nate Sanderson had been an unwelcome guest under her husband's roof—she could not in all fairness call it her own. Over and over she had told herself what she would say in case he ever showed his hand, but now when the crisis had come, her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She only found movement in slamming a stovelid down with a decisive gesture. Her whole body seemed to turn cold, in spite of the fire that flamed up from the opened stove lids as the man approached her. There was horror in the revulsion of her feeling against him. Her very lips felt palsied, but she forced the words to them, as the horror approached her.

"Go away! For God's sake, go away!" she begged.

"And leave you—to cry your eyes out after?" Nate Sanderson laughed nastily. "You don't know me, little one—not yet. I'll go—but you're coming with me—"

Nate Sanderson's speech was left unfinished. He was half bowled over by the feminine whirlwind who threw teapot and stove holder from her as she fled

from the kitchen out into the kitchen garden and the pebbled path and into the coming twilight.

Before he could even divine her purpose she had flown down the pathway—away from him.

"Little devil," gritted Nate Sanderson, as he strode toward the opened kitchen door and down the path toward the cove which her flying feet had trod. Right at the cove entrance he caught her—caught her just as she had sighted the dory pulled up on the small beach, the dory she knew was Trueman's —the dory that told her he must be somewhere about. Nate Sanderson saw it, too.

"Think he's come back, do you," he sneered. "He don't want you—this is only a convenient place for him to beach his skiff when he wants to go off to the club and see what they're saying about his—saintly—wife."

But Nate Sanderson had reckoned without the innate courage that is given even to the fisher-girl of those hard coasts. Martha Tisdale, in spite of her obscure parentage, in spite of the fact that her father had been the ne'er-do-well fisherman who was the jibe of his fellows, was a true daughter of those who had come long before that father—those who had left their heritage of courage and beauty and Yankee grit.

Martha Tisdale had been intimidated possibly until she had lost some of the courage of the ancestry that was far behind her father. She had shrunk at execrations. She had been afraid of holding up her head; had run away. But now that a crisis had

come, she turned on this man who pursued her as any wild man in another age might have pursued the female he had determined to haul off to his cave—turned on him with the rage of the female forced to extremity.

Perhaps there might have been something in the fact that she had sighted Trueman's dory, that she felt conscious of his nearness, even if he were in the town instead of here—at least he was not on his lightship across waters too unfathomable to be waded—but with a rush, whatever the reason, her courage—the courage she had not been able to summon in Boston save for that one minute in which she had slammed and bolted the door against this man—came to her. A daughter fit to be called of the vikings as the man who had taken her to mate might be called son, she faced the lecherous male who leered at her.

"You beast!" The serpent's voice was no less perceptible than that of the daughters of Eve handed down in a far earlier generation. "You filthy beast! You and your lying tongue—you took a fool of a woman—a poor witless crazy fool of a woman away—away from her own man—with a story crazier than she. And because she went, you think she's yours. Because she listened, because she thought she had to—to be polite and grateful enough—" There was an indescribable curl of disdain in the girl's perfect red lips—"Because she listened to your protestations of love—LOVE," the sneer became almost an animate thing, "you think

she's yours! Listen! Listen! Why, it wasn't you! It never was you! Any other smirking, lying, flattering thief would have served just as well just then! It was her own empty head, her own shallow vanity, her own pitifully-being sorry-for-herself-without-cause—her own blindness to the truth of life that took her away that time you're trying to make so much of!"

Her breath came in hoarse gasps as she tried to make her meaning known, a breath which on beginning had seemed so sure and strong. It died down, but went on before the astonished man could speak the laughing words of unbelief his lips had framed.

"Listen to me," she went on, her breath indrawn between her clinched teeth, "I never loved you—even when I said I might be—might be—" She shuddered as she saw the laughing lips of Nate Sanderson, who was refusing even to take this most serious moment of her life in earnest.

"Listen," she commanded, with a stamp of her foot in the sand, "don't think I *ever* loved you. You were something that only happened by chance. Now you are not even that! You're nothing at all! I love my own man—do you understand me? And this is how I love him—for his wonderful goodness, his great heart and soul; if it would serve him in any way, if it would give him a single moment of happiness or add a day to his beautiful life—I'd kill you where you stand, Nate Sanderson, and throw your carcass to the sea! And I'd pay the price twice over, and I'd count it a blessed privilege!"

With one arm extended as she uttered her last word, Martha Tisdale stood like some sea princess of old, in her cove home, sending forth the invaders from the enemy coasts. Her pointing finger almost touched Nate Sanderson's leering eye.

"Now go!" she commanded.

To Trueman Tisdale, screened from the sight of his wife and Sanderson behind a clump of small alders, there came, at the outburst from the wife he loved his full reward for all the heartbreak, all the ostracism, all the heroic abnegation of the many weeks since his wife's one mis-step.

It had been in no spying mood that Trueman had followed his wife and Nate to the cove. They had not seen nor heard him as he had trudged up the path toward the house after his landing. His crunch on the graveled walk had been drowned out by the drama of their talk. Then, hidden behind the hedge of hollyhocks and sunflowers, in their decaying splendor, he had seen the flight of Martha, and his heart ached that he could not rush out to her rescue. But that same Puritan heart with its New England training had bidden him halt—had told him that now was the decisive moment of her battle and that he must not interfere.

It had not, therefore, been in any spirit of spying, but rather with a doleful idea of shielding the woman he loved from the frailty which he did not even yet admit to himself was not, should she finally yield to her tempter, or—far better his heart told him—to help her should she need help, that he had

slipped along that same path taken by the flying Martha and trodden a bit more leisurely, but more confidently by Nate Sanderson. For in his heart, Trueman Tisdale, though he had left his wife to fight her own battle for her own good, had been sure that sooner or later Nate Sanderson would show his hand and would once more try to lure Martha from the path of duty!

He had prayed—and believed—that the man would not succeed. But as Martha, glorified by the power of righteous adoration for himself, visited her storm of repudiation on Sanderson, Trueman Tisdale could do nothing but bare his head, there in his clump of alders, as his heart sang within him and the unaccustomed tears of a strong man came to his eyes, and pray:

"Thou Everlasting God, I thank Thee!" his heart prayed, and as he remembered the text he murmured simply: "More joy for this penitent, Oh, Lord, than for the ninety and nine!"

It was the death struggle of the Tisdale Puritanism—the struggle that had been inherent so long that Tisdale, no more than the Bayport contingent of those left with the beliefs of long gone ancestors, could help believing—that "she or he who has sinned against even these least of these, our little conventions, has sinned against all."

CHAPTER XXIV

HAD her bitterest feminine enemies, back in the big room over the Neptune Club that was the headquarters of the Auxiliary, heard Martha Tisdale give her soul-drawn ultimatum to Nate Sanderson, they could no longer have doubted the girl's pure heart. The exceptions might have been Ma Tisdale and Mehitable Sands, but even they were women, and with women's feelings.

But in this, one of the bitterest periods of her life—the winning moment of her big battle, unknown to the wife of Trueman Tisdale, the pendulum was at last swinging in her direction, for back in that big room the Auxiliary membership was even then discussing the matter of Martha Tisdale—her errors, known and imagined—and whether she should be hounded out of town. The tide was turning.

Ma Tisdale had outreached herself.

The very bitterness of her attacks was having the opposite effect from that she wished. Slowly, but none the less surely, it was being borne in on the club members that they were not so much upholding the sanctity of their homes as they were taking part in a persecution. And with a majority of the women of Bayport, the years between the time when their

Puritan ancestors had gloried in persecutions and their own day had softened hearts.

Righteousness was one thing; persecution in the name of righteousness was another. And a great light was dawning on the women of Bayport to show them the difference.

So, when Mrs. Caleb Fish at last got up to have her say, in spite of attempts on the part of Ma Tisdale and Mehitable Sands to silence her, the ground was fertile for her sowing.

Men in the club room below wandered restlessly about, aimlessly—wondering what was going on upstairs—but none of them outside of Ozra Hemingway, who had attended the Auxiliary meeting as the favored guest of Ma Tisdale, had had the courage openly to ask for admittance. The sympathy for Martha was marked, but few words were said.

Silently, and in brotherly communion, and with a common interest, Captain Caleb and Captain Hen Berry smoked their black old pipes and waited for news. But when Ozra Hemingway—his wizened face more scowling, more disagreeable than was even his general way, flounced down the steps and threw himself into a chair beside the dismantled stove—they were looking for the kind of news Ozra had to give. Ozra was disappointed—very. That was evident from his unaccustomed silence; and the viciousness with which he snapped his long suffering suspender, as he glared at the unoffending stuffed sail fish on the wall above him.

Captain Hen broke the silence at last.

"Meetin' over," he inquired mildly.

"Fur as I'm consarned!" snapped Ozra, as he spat out venomously at the nearest cuspidor, "An' as far as I'm consarned I'm through with tryin' ter keep this here town God-fearin'! Fools!" And again his talon-like hands snapped his suspender as though he were wreaking some other vengeance on something more offensive.

"Somethin' amiss?" Captain Caleb did not restrain his grin as he drawled the question.

"Huh!" Ozra shook with the wrath the query produced. "Amiss?" he repeated. "What d'ye think them fool wimmen's been an' gone and done? 'Stead of votin' for Martha Tisdale to be sent outta town, damn ef they didn't vote her a apology. An' that hain't the worst," without deigning to note the happy faces of his clubmates at this, probably the first of the little man's news which had ever before brought a smile to those kindly old faces. "Didn't they go an' ackshally *vote her into the club!*"

With a groan he subsided into his chair, as though the matter were one completely prostrating.

Captain Hen Berry reached for his battered old cap, as Captain Caleb stood up.

" 'Low we might as well be gittin' along, Caleb," he remarked. "Quite a walk down the River Road, and we'll be wantin' to let Martha know the news immediate, won't we?"

At the door he stopped a moment to glance upward at the steps that led to the Auxiliary rooms.

"And—er—Caleb," he went on while a grin

played around his mouth and the face with its fringe of whiskers was more happily moon-like than ever before, "Do ye by any chance happen to know—has Anastasia got any female relatives who hain't married?"

But all unconscious of any vindication, unconscious of any ally, even of the nearness of her husband, Martha Tisdale was fighting her own decisive battle out on the sands of the cove near the Tisdale home. Surely, she thought, as she stopped for breath after flaying the man before her—her breast heaving, her dark eyes flashing lurid points of fire, her whole body trembling with the indignation which had wrought her up to the point of a fury—surely Nate Sanderson could not, would not misunderstand her.

But Sanderson did—or pretended to misunderstand.

It was hardly conceivable—the conceit that was the pivotal center of the freighter's mate—but it was there.

As Martha concluded, he stood for one moment looking at her with a cock-sure smile in the bold eyes of him. So sure was he of his own irresistibility that even now it could not come to him that Martha was doing other than playing a part. He twisted his small mustache diabolically as he smiled at her.

Gad, but she was desirable—never more so than right now.

This theatrical pose was decidedly becoming to her. But she would assuredly have to be taught to keep her place, that she could not say these things too strongly to Nate Sanderson. Enough was—

He laughed nastily as he took a step toward the girl who shrank from him, her feet unconsciously swerving to take her in a circular way past him and up to the temporary safety of the high point of land above the cove, the bluff that fell away sheerly to the rocks of the coast and the small beach in front of her home.

"What?" he sneered, but his teeth bared in a contemptuous smile. "Trying to play it out on that line, are you? What's the game? Another lover somewhere?"

Nate Sanderson could not know how close to death he was at that moment, for he could not see the death-like face of Trueman Tisdale hidden from sight behind the shrubbery with all the strength of will he possessed digging his fingers into his hands to restrain himself, but that gesture of muscled hands significant of what the neck of the sneering man who spoke might expect.

With another effort of will, Trueman Tisdale choked back the words that rasped his throat. Not yet! Not yet!

And so Nate Sanderson went on to his fate.

"You must think I'm a goat to swallow that gush about your wifely love—for a wooden-faced dummy like Tisdale—"

He made a leap forward, too soon for the girl

who had not been on the lookout to escape him. He clutched at her. "You damned little—"

The vile word that escaped his lips brought one gasp of horror from the girl.

To the eyes of the man back of the shrubbery as he took one step forward impulsively, there came murder.

"You—" he added, with his lips drawn back from his teeth in an animal-like lust. "I almost had you once, and I'm going to now—for once, and then be damned to you!"

With all the brutal self-confidence of a master who believed that his slave dare offer no real resistance, Nate Sanderson's arms went out to grasp the wife of the man who watched, the husband whose breath coming between his lips so harshly that it could not have gone unnoticed had not Sanderson's own sneering voice been pitched so high—had not his animalism blinded him and deafened him to all else.

Martha cringed backward, her hands held out to ward off the horrifying danger that threatened her. Wildly she looked about for escape, and before Sanderson's clutching hands had grasped her, she had turned and sped like a deer up the incline to the bluff above her.

Not in the least like a man who had been playing the invalid for the days he had wanted to remain in the woman's home, Nate Sanderson leapt after her. There was a look in his eyes—almost a blood lust—which might have been in the eyes of a brutal caveman who pursued a helpless captured prehistoric maid.

On the top of the bluff he overtook her—overtook her because there was no escape save by the way she had come or by throwing herself over the edge of the bluff to the rocks below. She gave a gasp of horror and closed her eyes as the man seized her roughly, holding both her hands in an iron grip behind her back.

"Now, damn you!" he hissed, as he whirled her about and seized her fiercely in his arms with a strength she could not combat, "You would, would you!"

Again came the nasty laugh as he held off the blows which she struck at him—wildly, with all her might—but with as little effect on the lust-maddened man as though they had been the wings of a sparrow fluttering against the rocks below them.

Roughly he pressed her to him, and his laugh rang out to drown her last despairing, smothered cry of "True!" as he pressed his leering face to her own.

"There," he triumphed, punctuating each word with a kiss that seared her soul, made of her in her own mind a thing as vile as the creature that fouled her. "Take that! And that! And that!"

So quickly had it all happened that, although he had been prepared for immediate action should Martha need him, Trueman Tisdale had not been able to reach his wife and the man who would despoil his home in time to prevent that contaminating kiss. The clump of cedars from behind which he had been so prayerfully watching his wife's courageous fight was farther from the bluff up which

she had fled than the point of land on the cove where she had taken her last stand and from where she had started to run.

The ground was rougher, too, between the cedars and the bluff than the space over which Martha had been pursued by Sanderson, and outcropping ledges of granite maddeningly obstructed the progress of the husband who rushed to the aid of his wife.

Nor, in their intentness, did they even hear the animal-like bellow of rage that issued from the throat of Trueman Tisdale as his long strides carried him over the short distance and to the top of the bluff where Nate Sanderson stood crushing the frightened woman in his arms.

The first intimation that he did not have things all his own way—that Trueman Tisdale was anywhere about—or cared what was happening—came when the dapper mate felt a vicious clutch and the lightship captain's sinewy right hand gripped him by the neck, his fingers sinking deep into the muscles of his throat, choking back the surprised cry.

As easily as he might have cast from him an annoying yelping puppy, Trueman Tisdale tore Nate Sanderson from his victim and flung him aside, and the cocksure mate, before he knew what had happened to him, had measured his full length on the ground.

Tisdale's words came from between clenched teeth. The sound of his voice was ominous.

"Nate Sanderson," he accented each syllable, "you've come to the end of your anchor chain!"

CHAPTER XXV

SOUNDLESSLY, all but breathlessly, but with the triumphant love light of the primitive woman who watches her mate fight for her, Martha Tisdale watched the beginning of that struggle which her heart told her would be a titanic, a climactic one.

Once her hands fluttered to her breast, not to arrange disheveled garments, but to clasp there as though to still the pounding of her heart. Movelessly she watched Trueman spring back as he flung his adversary to the ground, instinctively to crouch for the onslaught he knew would be forthcoming.

For, coward that he might be in some matters, Nate Sanderson was no physical one, and well Trueman Tisdale knew it. He had looked for an encounter—but nothing in his experience with Sanderson had prepared him for the craven action of the man when he drew himself up from the sand and leapt for Trueman.

For when he arose, agile and wary, crouched for a spring, he came with a pistol in his right hand. So deft, so cautious, had been his movement for that one moment he lay on the ground, that neither Martha nor Trueman had seen him draw it from his pocket.

One wild cry was wrenched from Martha Tisdale's throat as she leapt forward—too late—at sight of the weapon.

"Trueman!"

Too late, too, was Trueman's thrust forward at sight of the weapon. The shot that resounded along the beach, reverberating far out over the waters was coincident with his effort to strike the gun aside.

But it was the sight of the blood that spurted from his shoulder, reddening his shirt front and sleeve that maddened Trueman Tisdale to the point of becoming a fighting animal. For only one second did the impact of the bullet halt him, for in one long furious bound he had jumped the short space between him and the cowardly man and before Sanderson could collect himself for a second shot, Trueman Tisdale had grasped the other's pistol hand with a grip that drove his steel-like fingers between the others' knuckles like the teeth of a trap.

It was an elemental struggle, as Martha had known it would be. Her eyes followed eagerly, her soul prayerfully, as she stood helplessly rooted to the spot, watching the two men who fought—for her.

Each with his free hand rained blows on face and body of the other with the desperation of deadly hatred and the lust to kill. There were no rules—no compunction.

But all the while as he battled with his free hand, the hand which ran red with the blood from the wound in his shoulder—that wound that evened up any idea that the struggle might be an unequal

one, taking Sanderson's recent illness into consideration—the muscular fingers of Trueman Tisdale's other hand were boring into the muscles and sinews of the hand in which Sanderson still held the gun.

And at last, overcome by the paralyzing agony, that hand opened and the disputed weapon clattered to the rocky ground where it was kicked by their scuffling feet and struck from the reach of either.

Breaths, deadly with venom, hot with hatred, burned in each other's faces as the men flailed one another. But it was Trueman who, ignoring the mallet-like blows that hammered on his face and vitals, reached out with a quick motion to clutch his adversary by the throat with a choking grip, a terrible, murderous grip. He hissed into the gasping face:

"You're facing your Maker, Nate Sanderson—and I ain't envying you!"

Wildly Sanderson tried for a like grip on the throat of his enemy, but his grip lacked power, as Trueman laughed his mirthless harsh laugh and evaded it. The man's fingers became mere fluttering protests as he pawed at the iron fists that, squeezing his windpipe like a rag, were driving the last of his breath from his body.

With Trueman Tisdale, the tide was up—was at its flood—that tide for which his neighbors had so long waited in vain, that tide his wife had almost ceased to believe would ever run for her. But now in the man, every atom of the primal instinct in the

human animal roused to defense of its mate, was awakened.

That one foul word, flung with such brutal ruthlessness at a woman humbly repentant for even a small error—that loathsome violation of her person, made doubly sacred and precious by the fervor of her protestations of love for himself—those things roared in his ears and blazed before his eyes in a sea of red.

To kill this ravager, this desecrator of homes and faith, would be a little thing! To crush it, to smash it out of all semblance to humanity, to tear it to pieces with his hands, and let its corrupt blood run away into the sea—that would be, perhaps, some measure of relief for all the pent-up rage and repressed blood of those weeks past!

Trueman Tisdale's laugh came again, harsh, animal-like as he gloated, watching Nate Sanderson dying under his hands. The primitive rage of primitive manhood had taken complete possession of him.

He was not the Trueman Tisdale his wife, or his Bayport neighbors had known.

She watched this strange being with a terrified fascination, hardly conscious that he was crushing the life out of the hateful thing in human form which he held in his hands. For Trueman Tisdale, in those moments of violent emotion when he had seen his wife attacked had undergone a volcanic eruption, all the more severe because of its long restrained passion.

A single overwhelming purpose dominated him, as the veins swelled to bursting on his temples, as his lips drew back in a line across his set teeth; a single thought—to put an end to this hateful life!

With the suddenness of one of the crashes of thunder she had heard on the night she and Trueman had rescued Sanderson, and with all its violence, the significance of what was happening flashed over Martha Tisdale as she stood there, hypnotized, watching the struggle.

Trueman was killing Sanderson! Killing him!

He must not! Oh, he must not!

But he was—She saw the man's resistance cease, saw him suddenly go limp; his face was as suddenly suffused with a sickening dark flush! Another moment and it would all be over!

And with the realization, Martha Tisdale came to life from her hypnotic spell—to act. The thought was coincident with the action as she sped to the revolver which lay a few feet away, then to rush upon her husband and the man he held by the throat. With a strength she did not know she possessed, given to her in this, her greatest hour of need, she fought with the man who was fighting for her, struggling, clinging, dragging all her weight on the arms that held Nate Sanderson.

"Oh, Trueman! Trueman!" she screamed, her voice a wail that could be heard far up the beach and out into the River Road.

Captain Hen Berry and Captain Caleb, near the end of the road on their way to the Tisdale home,

stopped for just a moment as the cry reached them. Then when it came again, they started—started on a run. Something was wrong—very wrong.

And Martha Tisdale held on with a death grip of her own. "Trueman! Trueman!" she shrieked again and again. "Not you, True—not you, for the love of God! You must not! You must not! The law, man—the law! They'll put you in prison—kill you! This is for me to do—me, my expiation!"

Through his blurred consciousness, through all the murk of a thousand emotions, one word reached Trueman Tisdale. Prison!

The word brought with it a flash, a swift-racing picture of the consequence of this thing he was doing —a picture of Martha left alone, robbed of his protecting arm, living on and on in a torment of remorse—scorned, reviled, scourged, beaten by the tongue of slander into despair—madness, perhaps—with a lonely death at the end of a living hell of life. Martha! Who would give her life for him—her soul for his soul—to suffer all this through his greed for vengeance!

Slowly his steely fingers relaxed. Slowly, but surely, the breath of life flowed back into the gasping lungs of Nate Sanderson. And with one last glance at the man, Trueman Tisdale flung him from him with a great gesture of loathing.

Almost to the edge of the bluff the man staggered before he recovered his balance as his hands went up to the choking throat to urge the air faster—but on his face was a look of hatred that made of it a

gargoylish caricature of the Nate Sanderson he had been.

For one moment Trueman Tisdale's hands went up to cover his eyes from the sight. A great, heart-rending sob was torn from his throat.

"Martha! Martha!" came in broken accents.

And it was in that moment of covering his face that he did not see his wife, did not imagine her intention. He dropped his hands then to see her—saw her a few paces away—Martha, her face drawn and pallid as that of a corpse, slowly, with the immovable intent of deliberate death in her eyes, was bringing up that pistol to the level of the heart of the man who shrank back at the edge of the bluff.

For just the second it took his befuddled brain to take in the meaning of it, Trueman Tisdale stared, half comprehending. The full force of it struck him squarely between the eyes.

Martha was going to complete his vengeance! *His!*

Too late to grapple with her, Trueman was able only to reach her arm in that one bound before the shot came, to strike the weapon from her hand as it went off harmlessly in the air and then clanged metallically on the broken rocks under a cedar that hung downward over the edge of the cliff. His arms went around her. He had no thought for Sanderson, for anything, save her.

Martha! Who would do this thing for him! His head bent over to bury itself in her hair as she clung to him. His voice was broken.

"Martha! Martha!" he choked. "He is not worth it! I will not let you—"

The voice of Captain Hen Berry came from back of them as the small captain, breathing hard from his run up the bluff, brought Tisdale and Martha upstanding.

"True!" he cried. "Martha! Look out! Sanderson! He'll get the gun—"

Trueman whirled from his wife to leap forward. Step by step while he had been unnoticed, Nate Sanderson had been creeping toward the overhanging cedar and the weapon Trueman had flung there.

There was grinning murder, satanic triumph in the eyes of the man as they turned toward Trueman Tisdale leaping toward him, toward Martha, too horror-stricken to move, toward Captain Hen and big Captain Caleb, laboring up the cliff side, dumb at the tragedy they were too late to avert.

His hand went out to grasp the shining metal.

But it never reached it. With a grinding of stones and settling earth, a roar as of any angry surf, the cedar that had held through the storm of many a day, but had been so undermined by the last fierce onslaught that it clung to the cliff side by roots that might have been hairs, gave way beneath the weight of the man who crawled there on murderous intent.

For one second the horror-stricken watchers caught a glimpse of Nate Sanderson's face as he went hurtling down—down— He had not had time to realize what was happening to him. That face still wore a grin of triumph, that murderous intent.

Big Captain Caleb put out his protesting arm as Martha started to run forward to see what had happened—what was at the bottom of the cliff.

"No, Martha—you'd best not look," he said. "It's the judgment of the Lord—it wouldn't be a sight to be remembered—one who went to his Maker with murder in his heart and eyes."

Gently Trueman Tisdale drew his sobbing wife into his arms.

He held her to his heart as his eyes wandered out over the sea toward the lightship in the distance.

"My wife! *My wife!*" he whispered, reverently. "God is good to us—He's saved us from ourselves, from breaking His commandments. And He sent those to witness—"

Martha Tisdale's eyes lifted from her husband's breast for just one shuddering moment to glance at Captain Hen and Captain Caleb who stood staring dolefully down at the rocks beneath the cliff. Then her face was once more hidden against the protecting breast as she gave a great wonderful sigh at the comfort of her husband's arms.

Once more Trueman bent over to whisper.

"The tide's turned, Martha—the tide's turned. Ships don't go on the reefs because they want to, Martha—its mainly the fault of the helmsman, so—to-day I'm coming ashore from the lightship, little wife—*to stay!*"

END